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INTRODUCTION	3
REFERENCES	6
1. THE “NARRATIVE TURN” IN PSYCHOLOGY	7
THE EMERGENCE OF NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY	7
DAN MCADAMS: IDENTITY AS A LIFE STORY	9
HERMANS, HUBERT: THE DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY	13
MICHAEL WHITE AND DAVID EPSTON: NARRATIVE THERAPY	17
NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY. LIMITATIONS, TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES	20
REFERENCES	23
2. CONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVE SUBJECT	29
THE CRITIQUE OF THE SUBJECT AND THE CHALLENGE OF FRAGMENTATION	29
LIFE STORY: IDENTITY, SUBJECT AND SUBJECTIVITY IN MCADAMS’S APPROACH	33
THE DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY: TOWARDS DECENTRALIZATION	38
NARRATIVE THERAPY: BETWEEN SUBJECTIVATION AND AGENCY	41
CONCLUSION	45
REFERENCES	46
3. NARRATIVE SUBJECT. BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION	49
STABILITY AND CHANGE: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND NARRATOLICAL PERSPECTIVES	49
MCADAMS’S LIFE STORIES AND “THE MAKING OF THE SELF”	53
HERMANS’S DIALOGICAL SELF: MEANING AS MOVEMENT	58
WHITE AND EPSTON’S NARRATIVE THERAPY: ‘STORYING’ AND ‘RE-STORYING’ LIVES	62
CONCLUSION	66
REFERENCES	67
4. NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY	70
HOW PSYCHOLOGY MAKES ITSELF TRUE — OR FALSE	70
‘NARRATIVE IDENTITY EMPIRICIZED’: PROTOCOLS FOR NARRATING THE SELF	71
THE DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY, VALUATION THEORY AND THE SELF-CONFRONTATION METHOD	74
THE MAPS OF NARRATIVE PRACTICE	77
CONCLUSION	82
REFERENCES	83
5. NARRATIVE ETHICS	86
ETHICS AND ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGY	86
SELF AS A STORY: PLOT, TEMPORALITY, CLOSURE FROM AN ETHICAL POINT OF VIEW	87
THE DIALOGICAL SELF: BETWEEN POLYPHONY AND POWER	90
THE ETHICS OF NARRATIVE THERAPY	94
CONCLUSION: FROM ETHICAL PRACTICE TO THE PRACTICE OF ETHICS	98
REFERENCES	102

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the twenty-first century narrative psychology has emerged as a force to be reckoned with on par with psychoanalytic, cognitive and family approaches. As a distinct field of inquiry, narrative psychology is characterized by the elaboration of models of personality and self based on narrative principles. Representing a reaction against the cognitive-behaviour paradigm with its strong focus on information-processing, which has dominated academic psychology for nearly half a century, narrative psychology puts self-experience at the core of inquiry and therapy. As such, the valorizing of self-experience by narrative psychology corresponds to the growing trend of theorizing explicitly the place of selfhood and identity within politics and culture. As Anthony Elliott notes in his critical monograph, *Concepts of the Self*: “In contemporary social theory the cultures and conflicts of identity loom large, with the fragilities of personal experience and the self viewed as central to critical conversation concerning social practice and political transformation” (Elliott 2005: 15).

Narrative psychology represents an extension into the domain of psychology proper of a “narrative turn” that took place in the human sciences over the course of the last 30 years. This trend has reflected a growing awareness and recognition of the fact that narrative represents “a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change—a strategy that contrasts with, but is in no way inferior to, “scientific” modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws” as *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* explains (Herman et al. 2005: ix). As a result, an interest in narrative as a mode of production and as an explanatory paradigm has become prominent in communication and media theory, pedagogy, sociology, ethnography, jurisprudence, politics and artificial intelligence studies.

Tangible results of this development can be seen in the appearance of interdisciplinary books, series of books,<sup>1</sup> and internationally recognized journals<sup>2</sup> devoted to narrative theory and research. Another manifestation of cross-disciplinary interest in narrative is a proliferation of societies and associations dedicated to the study of narrative (including the European Narratology Network (ENN), the International Society for the Study of Narrative (ISSN) (formerly Society for the Study of Narrative Literature), the Centre for Narrative Research (CNR) at the University of East London, the Nordic Network of Narrative Studies (NNNS), and the Narrative Network in Australia), and a number of recent conferences intended to bring together humanistic and social-scientific approaches to narrative, such as “Narrative Matters”, an interdisciplinary conference on narrative research, perspectives and approaches across the humanities and social sciences.

As Vincent Hevern (2004) shows, since the 1980s psychology has witnessed an exponential growth of research and teaching activity centring on narrative. The intersection of narrative theory and psychology produced significant results regarding the narrative structuring of reality, the achievement of narrative intelligibility in conversation and the function of narrative in individual life experiences. It also led to the conceptualization of an array of “materials”—ranging from experimental protocols to therapeutic conversations—as “narratives”. Finally, this development culminated in the elaboration of models of personality and self based on narrative principles. In therapy, this move has been paralleled by a rapid growth in the popularity and acceptance of “narrative methods”.

The “narrative turn” in psychology has been taking place during the historical period variously characterized as the shift from modernity to post-industrial society, late capitalism or postmodernity. However, as Kenneth Gergen (2001) notes, psychology as a discipline has become notorious for its absence from the major cultural, political and philosophical debates of the second half of the twentieth century. Relying heavily on the ideals of positivism and empiricism, psychology strove to gain the status of a “real scientific discipline” and was preoccupied with perfecting research methodologies and firming disciplinary boundaries. The profession’s immense success in organizing itself as a discipline came at the expense of becoming “historically frozen and endangered by its isolation from major intellectual and global transformations of the

past half century" (Gergen 2001: 803). Positivist assumptions of academic psychology have been rarely challenged (Henriques et al. 1984).

Philosophical discussions of self, identity and subjectivity, by way of contrast, have insisted on embedding such categories within a broader problematics of the human sciences, specifically, in relation to problems of the production of knowledge, objectivity and truth. Postmodern theory has questioned assumptions about the universal and timeless character of the categories of self, identity and subjectivity and provided compelling arguments for them to be seen as dependent on historically specific communicative acts, hermeneutic processes and power relations. The critique of a unified and coherent model of self in various quarters of the humanities, such as anthropology, feminism, history, social sciences and philosophy, has highlighted the historical and cultural relativity of the self. Such critique has also led to recognition of the way in which the self is fractured along the lines of gender, race and class. The parameters of primacy, unity and the givenness of the self crumbled under this analysis. Finally, with the advent of the postmodern period the central outlook in social and political thought has shifted to a view of the self as "flexible, fractured, fragmented, decentred and brittle" (Elliott 2005: 2).

This view simultaneously articulates the postmodern condition and presents a major challenge to psychology: namely, how can this decentred, fragmented, contradictory self account for the meaning and purpose in human life—or are such ideas obsolete? Should they be forsaken by psychology and philosophy altogether? This is the challenge to which narrative psychology rises. The emergence of narrative psychology can be understood as part of a larger cultural development in the postmodern context where the work of decentring, fragmentation and alienation have put meaning in jeopardy, and the task of making intelligible individuals' lives and their experience of their personal journeys has acquired a heightened urgency. The central question that guides my analysis in this book is, "Why do we need narrative psychology now?" What challenges can a narrative elaboration of subjectivity, self and identity help humanity to face in the twenty-first century?

This book focuses on three important strands of contemporary narrative psychology, centring on pioneering figures advocating the narrative approach in three different locations: North America, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. In the US, an approach to self and identity as a life story has been developed during the last 2 decades by Dan McAdams and his followers. The collaborative efforts of Michael White in Australia and David Epston in New Zealand helped to launch the narrative movement in therapy in the late 1980s. At the same time, Hubert Hermans's research activity on the dialogical self in the Netherlands has made the University of Nijmegen a centre of dialogical research in psychology in Europe, culminating in the International Conference on Dialogical Self. These conferences have become a major forum for psychologists from different countries and continents sharing a common interest in dialogism.

McAdams's narrative identity, Hermans's dialogical self theory and White and Epston's narrative therapy evidence certain clear commonalities: all of them address meaning and intention in human lives; all three are rooted not only in psychological discourse but also in philosophy and interdisciplinary cultural theory; all of them borrow key metaphors from literary studies and literature; all of them encompass theoretical issues, research methods and therapeutic intervention simultaneously. Importantly, all three also engage with political debates. There are, however, some substantial differences particularly evident in the respective treatment of such issues as coherence of the self versus its decentred character; stability and continuity of self versus malleability, fluidity and change; and, last but not least, value judgements on whether some stories are better than others. This last raises an important issue of ethics in psychological theorizing and practice.

To a large extent, the differences between the three approaches can be attributed to their respective positions along a continuum that ranges from modern to postmodern views (Neimeyer and Raskin 2000). In this book I investigate how narrative is mobilized by each of the approaches, how fully the heuristic power of the construct of narrative is unpacked by each, and what aspects of the concept as yet remain untapped. Specifically, I explore the conceptualization of the subject, the

issue of psychological transformation, and the methodology offered by each of the approaches, concluding with an analysis of the ethical implications of each of the perspectives. If the narrative approach is often described as a critique of dominant trends in contemporary psychology, both theoretical and applied, the present project also assesses how far such critique goes and how it can be expanded further.

This analysis begins in Chap. 2 by outlining major features of the “narrative turn” in psychology. Building on the previous exploration of the broader “narrative turn” in the human sciences, this chapter situates narrative psychology as a distinct development within this historical and theoretical context. It argues that while constituting a new and original development, narrative psychology is constructed in both relation and opposition to a number of developments within psychology, philosophy and literary criticism, as key figures in narrative psychology note. McAdams acknowledges his indebtedness to both psychodynamic and cognitive models, Hermans draws on such diverse sources as symbolic interactionism and dialogism, while White and Epston are influenced by ethnographic modes of inquiry and political philosophy. All of these thinkers borrow many of their critical terms, such as narrative, story, plot, text and context, from literary criticism. Chapter 2 further provides a critical exposition of the three approaches under consideration: Don McAdams’s model of identity as a life story, Hubert Hermans’s dialogical self theory and White and Epston’s narrative therapy. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the scope and applicability of the narrative approach.

Chapter 3 raises the following questions: what are the links between stories and selves, and how might we theorize a “narrative subject”? In this chapter I offer a critical analysis of how the subject and subjectivity are understood within the three approaches under consideration and how, precisely, these approaches utilize narrative in their proposed models of self and identity. If identity is defined as a life story in McAdams’s model—as “a coherent and vitalizing life myth” (McAdams 1994: 306) that humans “naturally construct”—what presuppositions about subjectivity underpin this explanation of identity? Similarly, what conception of the subject underpins Hermans’s dialogical self theory, which utilizes the metaphor of a “society of mind”, populated by a multiplicity of “self-positions” that are capable of entertaining dialogical relationships with each other? Do Epston and White offer any models of the subject and self to ground narrative therapy at all? I further investigate how these approaches are positioned with regard to the essentialist understanding of self; how these approaches are located on a continuum from modern to postmodern views of self; and whether they tend to construct self as coherent and bounded or gravitate towards multiple and decentred models of subjectivity.

The challenging issue of personality stability versus change is addressed in Chap. 4. Beginning by outlining the range of views in academic psychology on the issue of stability and change, which stretch from the “set like plaster” view of personality traits to the notion of “the protean self”, I stress that the answer to the question, “Can personality change?” depends on how personality is conceptualized, on how change is measured and on the context—from childhood and adult development to therapy—in which the change is addressed. Accordingly, the chapter provides detailed analyses of how McAdams, Hermans, and White and Epston, respectively, define change itself, understand development in relation to time, and explain the role of narrative in identity-change. This chapter also engages with an idea of narrative as contingent and evolving, socially constructed and constructing, reinterpreted and reinterpretable. While Chap. 3 emphasizes how decentred, disunified subjectivities rather than a singular, unified subject are involved in the production and understanding of narratives, Chap. 4 highlights how narrative fluidity and contradiction can provide resources for psychological transformation.

Chapter 5 explores the techniques and methodologies developed and employed by McAdams, Hermans, and White and Epston in their research and clinical practice. This analysis aims to assess how their key concepts are operationalized and what epistemological significance is attached to narrative. In this context, the chapter examines in detail the *Life Story Interview Protocol* developed by McAdams and his collaborators, Hermans’s *Self-Confrontation Method* designed to explore the dialogical self, and White and Epston’s methods of narrative therapy. Specifically, I investigate the following aspects of narrative methodologies: how stories are

elicited and recorded; which structural features of the discourse are analysed; and whether the co-production of narratives through the dialogic exchange between interviewer and participant is taken into account. I further outline the implications of these methodological positions for therapeutic practice, focusing particularly on how the acknowledgement of multiple, contradictory life narratives can become a resource for therapy. I demonstrate that there is considerable variation in how McAdams, Hermans, and White and Epston employ the concept of personal narrative and, relatedly, in their methodological assumptions and strategies of analysis and clinical practice. I further offer critical discussion of the advantages and limitations of the methodologies in each particular perspective drawing on the general critique of knowledge articulated over the last 25 years from poststructuralist and postmodern positions.

Chapter 6 explores the intersections between the domain of storied selves and that of moral values. It seeks to analyse the concrete articulations of ethics in McAdams's model of identity as a life story, Hermans's dialogical self theory, and White and Epston's narrative therapy. This provides a way to grapple with the potential and the limitations of the narrative approach to ethics at the intersection with the real professional system and psychological practice. I further critically assess whether such models as the redemptive self, dialogical self theory and narrative therapy share assumptions of a prescriptive ethics, formulated in terms of substantive principles, concrete values, and virtue-as-duty principles, or do they treat moral values as an integral part of stories and storytelling because narratives themselves implicitly or explicitly ask the question about the good life? The chapter reaches a conclusion that if the appropriation of the notion of narrative proves to be constructive with regards to such crucial issues for psychology as the conceptualization of the subject, an understanding of stability and change, and research methodology, its greatest potential indubitably lies in foregrounding an ethical dimension in all of the above-mentioned areas.

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## 1. THE “NARRATIVE TURN” IN PSYCHOLOGY

### **The emergence of Narrative Psychology**

The history of narrative psychology can be construed in different ways. Given that psychologists conduct their research most often through language—by either interacting with their subjects in experimental conditions or as clients in therapy — narrative accounts can be identified within many psychological schools and practices. Some scholars draw attention to the role of narrative in psychoanalysis and share Donald Polkinghorne’s (1988: 120) view that “Sigmund Freud made an important contribution to narrative theory”, while Mark Freeman (1993), Jens Brockmeier (1997), Michele Crossley (2000) and some others (e.g. Ammaniti and Stern 1994) question Freud’s methodology and theoretical assumptions about narrative. They highlight the danger of naturalization of phenomena and structures that Freud described and emphasize the necessity to approach Freud’s work historically. These researches allow us to outline both the continuity and influences of psychoanalysis on modern narrative psychology and the latter’s radical difference from the former.

Indeed, for Freud, who is often described as the inventor of the “talking cure”, the investigation of life histories and, in particular, of autobiographical narratives was crucial to both psychology and psychopathology. However, as Brockmeier (1997) highlights, Freud’s interest was specifically focused on psychological illness stories — the formation and development of certain clusters of symptoms that originate in early childhood and manifest themselves in the neurotic clinical picture presented by the patients who consulted him in later years. The process of psychoanalysis consisted of questioning patients or analysands and interpreting their answers in an attempt to organize their experiences, fantasies and dreams within a narrative form, paying attention simultaneously to the micro analysis of language and to the overriding “life plot”. In this Freud emphasized the role of family dynamics, which were, for him, critical not only for the tracing of ontogenetic lines within specific case histories — for example, in “Dora”, the “Wolf man”, the “Rat man”, and “little Hans” — but also served as the theoretical foundations of many basic psychoanalytic concepts: the stages of psychosexual development, the theory of traumata, the emergence and the resolution of the Oedipus complex, the formation of individual energy and the etiology of character formation. These concepts were subsequently incorporated and to various degrees organized within Freud’s overarching model of the psyche, which he first described as the “topographic model” that divided the mind into Unconscious, Preconscious and Conscious, and which was later reformulated as a second tripartite model consisting of Id, Ego and Super-ego.

Arguing for fundamental continuity between psychoanalysis and contemporary narrative research, Roy Schafer (1992) points out that the Freudian approach utilizes narrative as the preferred mode of explanation. He describes the process of psychoanalysis as concerned essentially with eliciting and reshaping narratives. In Schaffer’s view, psychoanalysts are “people who listen to the narrations of analysands and help them to transform these narrations into others that are more complete, coherent, convincing, and adaptively useful than those they have been accustomed to constructing” (Schafer 1992: 240). Similarly, Donald Spence (1982, 1987) argues extensively for the narrative understanding of psychoanalysis. While acknowledging Schafer’s and Spence’s contributions to the rethinking of narrative, particularly as means “of refusal of the classical paradigm of historical truth within psychoanalysis”, scholars who have introduced narrative psychology as a distinct field of inquiry point to substantial differences between their approach and a narrative reinterpretation of psychoanalysis (Epston et al. 1992: 99). From their position, Schafer and Spence presented a narrative reading of psychoanalysis rather than arguments for the narrative nature of the psychoanalytic approach. Thus, McAdams (2008a: 243) outlines the principal difference between the psychological approaches that utilize narrative as a means in their inquiries and specifically narrative psychological approaches that make narrative their key explanatory principle:

Freud (1990/1953) wrote about dream narratives; Jung (1936/1969) explored universal life myths; A. Adler (1927) examined narrative accounts of earliest memories; Murray (1938) identified recurrent themes in the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) stories and autobiographical accounts. But none of these classic personality theories from the first half of the 20th century explicitly imagined human beings as storytellers and human lives as stories to be told.

For those scholars who identify themselves as modern narrative psychologists, the key factor seems to be that narrative is positioned not at the periphery of the model but in its very centre; for them, narrative represents not a feature but a nature of psychological functioning. From these positions, the pre-history of the narrativist turn in psychology is described somewhat differently, and refers to different key thinkers: William James, Theodore Sarbin and Jerome Bruner.

In *The Principles of Psychology* James (1890) proposed the concept of self as being directly implicated in behavioural, motivational and cognitive processes and, thus, central for personality functioning. James introduced an important distinction regarding the self, namely a distinction between self as subject, or *I*, and self as an object, or *Me*. James also referred to these constructs as the self as knower and the self as known. James further introduced a conception of empirical self as consisting of the material self, social self and spiritual self.

James's *I*—*Me* dichotomy was reconceived by Sarbin (1986) in narrative terms. Sarbin suggested that the uttered pronoun, *I*, stands for the author, while the *Me* becomes the actor or narrative figure. Therefore, the self as author, the *I*, can imaginatively construct a story in which the *Me* is the protagonist. Suggesting that people in the process of self-reflection order their experience in a story-like fashion, Sarbin introduced narrative as a root metaphor for psychology. Narrative construction serves as a means of organizing episodes and actions into coherent wholes and is instrumental in the assessment of the significance of actions. Sarbin's proposal of narrative as a root metaphor for psychology has become an important point of reference for psychologists developing narrative models of self and identity.

A more general contribution to the development of narrative psychology was made by Jerome Bruner. In his influential studies *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Bruner 1986c) and *Acts of Meaning* (1990) Bruner posited narrative as a privileged mode in the “proper study of man” that should be concerned first and foremost with the issue of “meaning and the processes and transactions involved in the construction of meanings” (1990: 33). Bruner addressed a number of key issues of psychological functioning from a narrative perspective. He suggested that human beings are storytellers by nature and provided evolutionary arguments to support the view that the human brain is specifically designed for storytelling.

Taking inspiration from James, Bruner distinguished two fundamentally different forms of human knowing: paradigmatic, concerned with scientific and rational discourse, and narrative, which serves to convey and explain human conduct. The paradigmatic, or logico-scientific mode, “leads to good theory, tight analysis, methodological proof, and empirical discovery guided by reasonable hypothesis”, while the narrative mode “leads to good stories, gripping drama [and] a believable [...] historical account” (Bruner 1986b: 13). Bruner not only reiterated the distinction between the logico-scientific mode of knowledge and narrative knowledge but also insisted that the latter should be positioned alongside the former, both being complementary but irreducible to one another and serving essential, although different, functions.

Even more pertinent to psychology, the narrative mode addresses the issue of agency as it “deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course” (Bruner 1986b: 13). Furthermore, the narrative mode pays attention to the particularities of experience and singularity of occurrence, while “the paradigmatic mode, by contrast, seeks to transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction, and in the end disclaims in principle any explanatory value at all where the particular is concerned” (Bruner 1986b: 13).

Bruner outlined a difference between “objective reality” and “psychological reality” and suggested that folk psychology operates as an instrument of culture in producing individuality

and meaning. Taken together, these ideas were supported by Bruner's powerful conviction that culture and not biology is pivotal in shaping human psychological functioning on many levels:

[...] it is culture, not biology, that shapes human life and the human mind, that gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretative system. It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture's symbolic systems — its language and discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually dependent communal life. (Bruner 1990: 34)

Bruner's work laid the ground for much of the later narrative inquiry in psychology, not only by elaborating propositions but also by raising questions. Following Bruner's intervention, the basic narrative analogy became an overarching paradigm for a number of narrative models of self, personality and identity elaborated in the 1980s and 1990s, each of them engaging with the issues that Bruner raised from different angles.

### **Dan McAdams: Identity as a Life Story**

In the US, the narrative approach was powerfully articulated and pursued by McAdams and his followers. Drawing on William James's, Jerome Bruner's, Theodore Sarbin's and Erik Erikson's work, McAdams (1985) proposed a life story model of identity, which implies that narrative accounts of people's lives, constructed as evolving stories imbued with a sense of integrity and continuity, represent the core of personality. By the early 1990s McAdams (1993, 1994) had further developed his model to describe personality on three levels: the level of dispositional traits, the level of personal concerns and the level of life narrative. On the first level, personality is characterized through broad, non-conditional, relatively decontextualized, linear, and implicitly comparative constructs (traits). While acknowledging that this traits level is important in providing a dispositional signature in personality description, McAdams argues that such description does not tell much beyond a "psychology of the stranger", and that to go beyond this level one should seek information that is conditional and contextualized. This kind of description can be obtained on a second level. Here, at the level of "personal concerns", "personality description invokes personal striving, life tasks, defence mechanisms, coping strategies, domain-specific skills and values, and a wide assortment of other motivational, developmental, or strategic constructs that are conceptualized in terms of time, place, or role" (McAdams 1995: 365). However, as McAdams notes, although strivings and goals are indicative of what a person is trying to do, "they are not enough to tell the psychologist who a person is trying to be, or [...] what person the person is trying to make" (1994: 306). Thus, the third level of personality concerns "the making of the self". McAdams conceives this process of identity-making that lends a sense of meaning and unity to human lives as "an internalized and evolving story that integrates a reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future into a coherent and vitalizing life myth" (1994: 306).

Over the following 15 years McAdams's paradigm gave rise to many productive research projects and theorizing, including analyses of case studies, life histories, autobiography, psychobiography, ethnography and discourse analysis. The methods employed in these studies tended to privilege qualitative over quantitative analysis, hermeneutics over positivistic frames, idiographic over nomothetic approaches, and inductive over hypothetico-deductive strategies of inquiry. Beginning in the early 2000s, some of these researches were published in the edited series *The Narrative Study of Lives*, comprising 11 volumes. In the first volume, *Turns in the Road: Narrative Studies of Lives in Transition*, a range of narrative psychologists explored how significant transitions and turning points in the human life course — such as developing a sense of identity in adolescence, coping with divorce or overcoming addiction — were rendered in narrative (McAdams et al. 2001). It also featured an introduction by McAdams and Bowman that focused on life's turning points theorized through the notions of redemption and contamination, the themes that would guide McAdams's inquiry over the next few years. The second (Josselson et al. 2003) and third (Lieblich et al. 2004) volumes in the series focused on the teaching and learning of narrative research and the relationship between narrative and psychotherapy,

respectively. The fourth volume, *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative* (McAdams et al. 2006), explored three major dilemmas in narrative research on identity: debates over the unity or multiplicity of self; the relative contributions to narrative identity of individual self-agency and the impact of society; and stability and continuity of self versus change and growth.

Several lines of McAdams's inquiry culminated in his in-depth exploration of contemporary American identity, undertaken in the wake of September 11, 2001, and in response to a question he saw reverberating throughout American society: what does it mean to be an American today? (McAdams 2006). Pursuing his general insight that, if "American identity" lies anywhere, it lies in the stories that American people live by, McAdams focused on a particular kind of life story told, lived and imagined by many productive and caring American adults, men and women who scored highly on quantitative measures of generativity. Drawing on a wide range of sources from literature, history, politics and popular culture, McAdams outlined a particular type of story that he defined as the "redemptive self" and positioned it as characteristic of contemporary American identity. McAdams described the redemptive self as follows:

Here is a personal story — a biographical script of sorts — that many very productive and caring American adults see as their own: *In the beginning, I learn that I am blessed, even as others suffer. When I am still very young, I come to believe in a set of simple core values to guide me through a dangerous life terrain. As I move forward in life, many bad things come my way — sin, sickness, abuse, addiction, injustice, poverty, stagnation. But bad things often lead to good outcomes — my suffering is redeemed. Redemption comes to me in the form of atonement, recovery, emancipation, enlightenment, upward social mobility, and/or the actualization of my good inner self. As the plot unfolds, I continue to grow and progress. I bear fruit; I give back; I offer a unique contribution. I will make a happy ending, even in a threatening world.* (McAdams 2008b: 20)

The redemptive self study provides an impressive elaboration of McAdams's thesis that self and culture come together through narrative. Rooted in rich cultural material, the study provides a detailed demonstration of how some themes that hold a powerful sway over the contemporary American imagination run through foundational myths and popular culture: from the Puritan myth, which centres on the idea of the chosen people, to the 12-step program, from Benjamin Franklin's autobiography to the ubiquitous plot of upward mobility celebrated by Hollywood, from the stories of escaped American slaves to Oprah Winfrey's productions, from the gospels to the inspirational speeches of business gurus. In addition, the study also demonstrates how the ideas that have guided McAdams's work for nearly 25 years, such as Erik Erikson's model of life cycle development and Jerome Bruner's ideas on narrative, can be not only applied but also extended.

The most recent stage of McAdams's career has also been characterized by the growing tendency to "take stock" of his research and elaborate broader integrative models accounting for personality functioning from a narrative perspective. Reflecting on a quarter century of his own research and the work of other psychologists who study life stories, McAdams (2008a) has identified six common principles in the narrative study of lives. According to *principle 1*, the self is storied. Drawing on Antonio Damasio's (1999) argument that consciousness is inextricably linked with the brain's power to tell stories and Bruner's contention that human beings are storytellers by nature, McAdams insists that "the self is both the storyteller and the stories that are told" (McAdams 2008a: 244).

*Principle 2* maintains that stories integrate lives. While stories do many things — entertain, educate, inspire, motivate — among their most important functions is synthesis: stories bring elements of lived experience and mental processing that were previously separate into a coherent and understandable whole. *Principle 3* underscores that stories are told in social relationships and as such represent social phenomena, guided by societal expectations and norms. *Principle 4* emphasizes that stories change over time. While autobiographical memory is notoriously unstable, the life story is also subject to more profound changes over time, reflecting shifts in how a person comes to terms with the social world across the lifespan. *Principle 5* asserts that stories are cultural texts. As McAdams had argued previously, stories live in and mirror the culture

wherein the story is created and told. *Principle 6* addresses the ethical dimension of narrative identity and suggests that some stories are “better” than others. Reiterating Alasdair MacIntyre’s contention that a life story always suggests a moral perspective, McAdams further suggests that stories themselves can be evaluated as relatively good or bad from a psychological standpoint, though such evaluations are also embedded within particular moral perspectives of the society in which the story is evaluated.

Taking the task of constructing an overarching methodological paradigm one step further, McAdams and Pals (2006) suggest locating narrative identity within an integrative conceptual framework for personality functioning that they polemically dub “The New Big Five”. In doing so McAdams and Pals refer to a highly influential model in personality psychology in the 1990s called the “Big Five” that provided a description of personality in terms of traits. McAdams and Pals explicitly contrast their “New Big Five” with the “Big Five” factors model advanced previously by authors such as Costa and McCrae, Goldberg, and others who proposed the analysis of personality along five factor-analytically-derived categories: extraversion (vs. introversion), neuroticism (negative affectivity), conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience (Costa and McCrae 1989, 1994; McCrae and Costa 1997). Underlying the model were also a number of assumptions regarding personality traits, such as that individual differences in self-reported traits are consistent with particular types of behaviour or that traits are powerful predictors of important life outcomes, such as mental health or marital satisfaction.

By contrast, “The New Big Five” encompasses five broad and interrelated concepts that include but are not reducible to traits; they are: evolution, traits, adaptations, life narratives and culture. This framework conceives of personality as “(1) an individual’s unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of (2) dispositional traits, (3) characteristic adaptations, and (4) self-defining life narratives, complexly and differentially situated in (5) culture and social contexts” (McAdams 2008a: 248). This model reflects a growing trend in psychological theorizing towards integrative approaches that cut across interdisciplinary and methodological divides and address the principal subject of psychological research — the living human being — in a holistic and comprehensive manner (McAdams and Pals 2006; Sheldon 2004; Singer 2005).

In his latest monograph, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, McAdams (2015) continues to define personality as a developing complex of traits, goals and stories, set within culture and context, evolving from infancy through old age. Yet he also introduces a new model of personality organization consisting of three distinct layers — the social actor who expresses emotional and behavioural traits, the motivated agent who pursues goals and values, and the autobiographical author who constructs a personal story for life. He proposes that these layers appear at different developmental stages and serve different functions, and traces how personality evolves throughout a lifetime. The book builds on research in personality and developmental psychology that McAdams has been conducting over the last 30 years and introduces not only a new integrating logic, but also an innovative reference to the “artfulness” of human life. In McAdams’s words, “The “art” of personality refers to the idea that every human life is like a unique work of art — a never-to-be-repeated variation on human nature, developing over time. The “science” comes in when we notice regular patterns or trajectories of the developing person — regularities that can be observed, measured and predicted” (cited in Sherman 2015).

While McAdams’s work overall generated a considerable following and a rich stream of research, it has been critiqued on several grounds. Polkinghorne (1996) outlined three important sets of concerns that would prove to be the major points of debate throughout later developments of McAdams’s theorizing. First, Polkinghorne questions what kind of relationship is intended among the levels postulated in McAdams’s model. Second, he raises the question of historical situatedness of the kind of narrative identity that McAdams proposes. Finally, Polkinghorne highlights potential limitations of an identity model being reduced to story, to the exclusion of non-verbal realities of psychological experience.

Polkinghorne notes that the relationship between different levels within McAdams's model — traits, situational responses (goals and struggles), and narrative identity — is not clearly specified. Polkinghorne observes that McAdams's position can be read in three different ways. First, McAdams's ideas can be thought of as advocating "equal partnership type of relationship" between the three domains of traits, life struggles and goals, and narrative identity. But in this case Polkinghorne argues that the framework McAdams proposes "is simply an enlargement of the personality psychology circle to encompass the recent developments in narrative psychology" (1996: 364). Polkinghorne further points out that McAdams also employs a second way of conceptualizing the relationship between the levels, where they are depicted as partially overlapping, with the narrative approach privileged over situational and trait approaches because of its capacity to serve as a higher order discourse. From this position, it is through inclusion in narrative that traits and situations become invested with meaning and integrated "into the unfolding drama by which people understand who they are" (Polkinghorne 1996: 364). In this model the narrative approach provides a lens through which researchers can view personality, rendering its elements (such as traits) parts of an integrated story. Finally, in Polkinghorne's reading, the ranking scheme and labelling levels with numbers employed by McAdams implies a hierarchical relationship between the levels, where narrative identity, placed at Level III, is privileged over the other two.

In his late reflection on the issue McAdams admits that throughout his research career he has used the notion of level "in many different and inconsistent ways" (McAdams and Manczak 2011: 41). He acknowledges that there is a tension between the use of the concept of level within the three levels scheme depending on which question he mobilizes it to address: "Can personality change?" or "What do we know when we know a person?" Yet, he insists that the relationship between different levels has always been understood as non-hierarchical. He further asserts that he currently sees a developmental logic articulated in his latest model of the self (as an actor, an agent and an author) "as providing the most intellectually satisfying understanding of the relations between dispositional traits, motives and goals (and related constructs), and life stories" (McAdams and Manczak 2011: 42).

The second set of concerns that Polkinghorne outlines tackles the issue of the historical situatedness of McAdams's model of identity as a life story. Polkinghorne notes that it appears that this model is proposed as a universal explanatory paradigm, presenting narrative identity as "a necessary component of personality for all humans" regardless of historical, geographical and cultural differences between human societies. From Polkinghorne's perspective, the narrative identity formation that McAdams outlines is not necessary in pre-industrial societies, where "a relatively authoritative and consistent set of answers to people's identity concerns" was provided. This created the requisite conditions for "unproblematic" "assimilation of and incorporation of the culture's storied answers to [people's] questions of identity" (Polkinghorne 1996: 364). Polkinghorne argues that the pressing need to construct identity and to use narrative resources for doing this arises with the move into the post-industrial Western period, a period of transition, presenting people with multiple and conflicting stories as a resource for their identity building rather than a unified set of identity scenarios. McAdams responded to this set of questions by firmly linking his model of identity as a life story with modernity and pitting it against the postmodern understanding of self and identity.

The third set of concerns raised by Polkinghorne relates to the linguistic reductionism and disembodied character of McAdams's narrative identity model. Polkinghorne argues that the emphasis on narrative implies that identity can be transparently translated into language. For Polkinghorne, however, "There are significant differences between the identity story as it is lived and the story as it is told" (Polkinghorne 1996: 365). He suggests that the identity formation process is guided not by the rational Cartesian subject, but rather by Merleau-Ponty's "body-subject", which represents not a substance but an integrated, embodied activity. Its manner of operation is holistic, emotionally informed, metaphorical and analogical. Polkinghorne draws on Ricoeur's contention that the fullness of a person's operating identity story is not accessible to him or herself through (phenomenological) reflection. When experiential meaning of identity is

expressed in language it is converted into literary forms and affected by the audiences to whom these are communicated. Polkinghorne insists that it is important to differentiate the life stories gathered through narrative research and experientially functioning identity stories, which are conflated in McAdams's writings.

The tension detected by Polkinghorne between McAdams's essentialism insisting on the universal character of narrative identity and McAdams's commitment to the imperatives of modernism will serve as a point of departure for my analysis which seeks to historicize and problematize McAdams's writings.

### **Hermans, Hubert: The Dialogical Self Theory**

Another way of linking personality and narrative has been pursued since the 1960s by Hubert Hermans and his colleagues and followers. Hermans began his work within the individual differences approach, devising psychometric tests; he then moved towards a narrative approach, introducing a “self-confrontation method” designed to investigate the changing meaning of life events as part of a developing personal meaning system; finally, beginning in the 1990s, Hermans elaborated a dialogical approach to self “based on the assumption that the self is not organized around a core or inner self, but consists of a decentralised multiplicity of positions, or voices, that construct personal meaning as a result of their mutual interchange” (Hermans 2006: 6).

Hermans's early research on personality was guided by the same question that McAdams raised towards the beginning of his career: “What do we know when we know a person?” It was self-evident for Hermans that “one can acquire knowledge about persons by describing them in terms of traits categories” (Hermans 2006: 6), the same categories McAdams located on the first level in his initial version of the narrative identity model. However, Hermans was quick to acknowledge that there was a tension between a static view of personality presupposed by the traits approach on the one hand and counselling and therapeutic procedures insisting on the existence of a changeable and malleable self on the other. Besides, Hermans's focus on two particular aspects of personality functioning — achievement motive and fear of failure — attracted critique on ideological and political grounds as not only representing but also confirming the core values of an achievement-orientated, consumerist society. This criticism resonated with Hermans's own uneasiness about the broader implications of his methodology. As a student Hermans was trained in two very different traditions: the American empirical approach and the European philosophical tradition, significantly influenced by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's maxim “Dasein ist Mitsein”, implying that our being in the world is intrinsically being together with other people and that the specific nature of human being can only be properly understood as a part of social relationship, was not easily reconcilable with an exclusive focus on the struggle for achievement.

Thus, feeling the need to acknowledge the intrapsychological aspects of personality functioning and its developing character, Hermans began to elaborate the self-confrontation method encompassing a narrative understanding of person. The method was intended to provide solutions to the problems that Hermans had encountered earlier. It was supposed to (a) enable clients to construct stories about their lives according to the meaning they attribute to different events — and not to be guided by one or several variables imposed by a researcher; (b) facilitate a gradual transition from assessment to therapeutic change; and finally (c) be based on a cooperative rather than on an objectifying relationship between counsellor and client. Overall, “the method should be a theory-guided, idiographic instrument in which two experts cooperate in order to construct a personal meaning system (or valuation system) that facilitates a gradual transition between assessment and change” (Hermans 2006: 9—10). The self-confrontation method is based on *valuation theory*, which defines the self as an “organized process of valuation” — a construction of the meaning of events as positive, negative or ambivalent (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995). In the application of the self-confrontation method Hermans discovered that some valuations demonstrated changes that were significant from a therapeutic point of view and that it was precisely the combination of stability and change that was characteristic of an effective therapeutic process.

Over decades of research employing the confrontation method, Hermans established that people typically do not have only one integrative story to tell, but rather many stories told from various angles. These different and sometimes contradictory narratives seem to be constructed from different positions within an individual's self. These observations prompted Hermans and his colleagues to propose a decentralized multivoiced model of self (Hermans 1996). Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on dialogue provided a key metaphor for this model, and so the notion of the "dialogical self" was born. Hermans saw the potential of bringing together both philosophical and psychological modes of inquiry for deepening the concepts of meaning and self. Besides Bakhtin, Hermans and his colleagues drew on a number of philosophical, psychological and literary sources, which were most explicitly outlined in the research monograph *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement* co-authored with Harry Kempen (Hermans and Kempen 1993). While situating their inquiry between the opposing positions of Descartes's "thinking in splendid isolation" and Giambattista Vico's "knowledge resulting from communication", Hermans and Kempen further drew on the work of Bruner, the Gergens, Ron Harré, McAdams and Sarbin. However, in contrast to these thinkers — and in particular to McAdams, for whom *story as such*, and not its context or addressee, provides a point of departure — Hermans and Kempen insisted that the very notion of narrative or story is already always dialogical, since it presupposes the existence of a teller and an actual or imagined presence of a listener or audience. To extend these considerations, Hermans and Kempen further mobilized Bakhtin's dialogical approach, in particular the notion of the polyphonic novel.

In his foundational work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin (1973) had argued that within Dostoevsky's novels there is not a multitude of characters and fates within a unified objective world, organized by an omnipresent author, but rather a plurality of independent consciousnesses and worlds. Correspondingly, Hermans and Kempen suggested a challenge — within the discipline of psychology — to the existence of an "omniscient self as representing a highly centralised position from which the self as a whole could be organized and perceived" (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 59). Extending these considerations, and integrating Sarbin's conception of *I* as author and *Me* as actor with Bakhtin's dialogical approach, Hermans and Kempen conceptualized the self "in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions in the landscape of the mind. [...] As different voices, these characters exchange information about their respective *Me(s)* and their worlds, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self" (Hermans 2004b: 19).

For Hermans, dialogue is not restricted to different parts of the self, but also encompasses a dialogical relationship between an individual and the outside world. Redefining G.H. Mead's (1934) notion of "generalised other" within the dialogical paradigm as a "collective voice", Hermans and Kempen demonstrate how collective voices speak through the voice of an individual person. Similar to McAdams's acknowledgement of relative historical and cultural dominance, they highlight that dominance of one meaning always implies the temporary suppression of another. Developing this idea, Hermans thus proposes a decentralization of both the concept of self and the concept of culture (Hermans 2001). Hermans challenges both the idea of a core, essential self and the idea of a core, essential culture, and proposes to conceive self and culture as a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can be established. Cultures and selves begin to be seen as moving and mixing and as increasingly sensitive to travel and translocality. Particular attention is paid to collective voices, domination and asymmetry of social relations, and embodied forms of dialogue. Two critical dimensions of this larger context of individuals' functioning are exchange and social power. While exchange for Hermans relates primarily to the respective taking of different positions by partners of dialogues and their real or imaginative exchange necessary for understanding, power is always embedded in this relationship — the positions can never be equal, and always reflect or are predetermined by power balances originating in a socio-cultural order.

Hermans's most recent works expand the dialogical self theory (DST) to address new intrapsychological, interpsychological and social issues. In addition to the core assumptions of DST, in *The Dialogical Self: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society*

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) explore such issues as the impact of globalization and localization on self and identity; self and identity in historical perspective; and practical implications of DST for organizations, motivation and conflict resolution.

The authors start by addressing an issue that is both psychological and political: how the self and identity operate and are to be understood in the context of globalization and localization. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka argue that a dialogical conceptualization of self and identity in which global and local voices are involved in continuous interchanges and negotiations provides a promising avenue for addressing the most pressing issues of our time, such as the growing uncertainty that motivates individuals and groups to find local niches for identity construction. They further propose studying self and identity on three levels — individual, local and global — paying particular attention to the increasing number of voices and countervoices, the role of social power, and the role of emotions.

Another useful innovation in this book is the addition of historical perspective on the issues of self and identity. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka outline three different perspectives on self, associated with different historical phases — traditional, modern and postmodern — and discuss advantages and “shadow sides” of each of the perspectives. They then suggest that the dialogical model of self provides a framework that can allow for the negotiation between these perspectives. This is important given that different perspectives do not succeed each other, but rather aspects of these different perspectives coexist in a contemporary society that raises significant challenges for contemporary identity building efforts.

Further theoretical enrichment comes from the authors’ engagement with the developmental perspective. Here, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka focus on evidence related to the emergence of dialogical relationship from early pre-verbal interactional practices between the infant and its significant others. They outline a number of precursors or early manifestations of dialogical self, such as the phenomenon of joint attention, turn-taking and role-playing. Their central argument here is that self-reflection and self-knowledge are mediated from the very beginning by the interaction with the Other, which forms a solid basis for the later emergence of dialogical self.

This analysis ties in well with a discussion of emotions and the brain. From Hermans and Hermans-Konopka’s perspective emotions are of direct relevance to the functioning of the dialogical self because they can either hinder or facilitate the dialogical relationship between different positions within the self and between self and the other. While persistent anger can present an obstacle to dialogical relationship, love can foster and promote the dialogue. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka focus closely on three types of emotions that they consider particularly prominent in their different historical models of the self: gratitude as the key emotion in the traditional period, self-esteem emotions as typical of the modern period, and enjoyment as the quintessentially postmodern emotion. The authors conclude by proposing a model that can facilitate articulation, clarification and changing of emotions and is based on the development of a dialogical relationship between emotions.

Finally, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka unpack practical implications of DST for organizations, motivation and conflict resolution. Given the complexity of contemporary organizational cultures the authors argue for the value of dialogical leadership, whereby a dialogical leader has a variety of *I*-positions in his repertoire and can move and negotiate between them with great flexibility. Dialogical leadership can meet the challenges of an increasingly complex work environment for both individual and organizations, while dialogical relationships more broadly represent a powerful means of conflict resolution.

The edited collection *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory* that appeared 2 years later demonstrated the scope and breadth of the expanded DST, with contributions addressing developmental and cross-cultural aspects of DST, the relationship between new technologies and dialogical self, methodological issues, and implications for therapy and workplace (Hermans and Gieser 2012). It also made an intervention on a metatheoretical level by positing DST as a bridging theory with regard to scientific knowledge and practices. Hermans and Thorsten Gieser propose that DST is neither a “grand” theory aspiring to provide a comprehensive explanation of

much of human behaviour, nor a “mini” theory focused on a particular aspect of human functioning. They contend that “It is rather a bridging theory in which a larger diversity of theories, research traditions and practices meet, or will meet, in order to create new and unexpected linkages” (Hermans and Gieser 2012: 4). On a metatheoretical level DST thus becomes a tool facilitating an intellectual dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and theoretical thresholds. As Hermans and Gieser explain, “this framework is formulated in such an open way that different, separated or even contradictory conceptual systems or approaches can find a platform that enables them to meet other theories, research, traditions and practices, in the service of their further development and security” (Hermans and Gieser 2012: 4).

Finally, Hermans’s (2012) *Between Dreaming and Recognition Seeking: The Emergence of Dialogical Self Theory* provides an account of some significant — and sometimes destabilizing — events in his life and investigates their meaning through the lens of DST. The book demonstrates much of the potential of DST to negotiate the sense of self across the lifespan by engaging in a dialogue between different *I*-positions, and also provides an example of an integration of the personal and professional life of a person dedicated to the quest for meaning.

Over the last 30 years Hermans’s valuation theory, the DST, and the self-confrontation method have contributed to research in a broad range of psychological subdisciplines including personality psychology (e.g. Barresi and Juckes 1997; Hermans 2002; Hermans and Bonarius 1991; Hermans and Oles 1996; Lamiell 1991; Thorne 1995; Valsiner 2002), developmental psychology (Hermans 1992; Sandfort 1984; Valsiner 1997), clinical psychology (Dimaggio et al. 2006; Hermans 1998; Lysaker and Hermans 2007), psychotherapy (Hermans 1989; Hermans and Dimaggio 2004; Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1992), counselling (Hermans 1987; Hermans et al. 1990; Neimeyer 2006), cultural psychology (Hermans 2001; Hermans and Kempen 1995; Hermans et al. 1992), the psychology of religion (Hermans and Van Loon 1991; Rioux and Barresi 1997), personal construct psychology (Hermans 2003; Neimeyer et al. 1998), and the discussion of effects of a global digital age on self (Hermans 2004a).

At the same time, the DST has been met with some scepticism in the mainstream psychological community. Questions have been raised whether the kind of radical dialogical freedom implied by this theory is necessarily beneficial, and it has been suggested that it could also lead to confusion, disorientation and indecisiveness (Pollard 2004). Hermans speculates that such scepticism reflects the social sciences’ lack of interest in the notion of dialogue. He further points out that the gap between theory and research and lack of research procedures that are sufficiently common to allow for the exchange of research data among investigators further contribute to cautious attitudes on the part of mainstream psychology with regard to his theory.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the limitations of the DST are also probed by the researchers who share Hermans’s interest in and commitment to dialogue. Prior to the publication of *The Dialogical Self: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* Hermans was criticized for a tendency to overlook the relationship between the dialogical self and the pre-intentional and inarticulate dialogical processes. For example, Ian Burkitt challenged the status of Hermans’s early agentic, dialogical *I* as “something that originally exists apart from voice with the ability to move at will between positions and voices, seemingly animated by its own agency”; he claimed that this view overlooks the developmental fact of “the sense of ‘otherness’ within the self: that from the earliest years our sense of self is intertwined with the voices of others, often in unwanted, unplanned, unwelcome, and surprising ways” (Burkitt 2010: 306). Similarly, Matthew Adams (2010) argues that the emphasis on linguistic and voiced connotations of the dialogical self may be restricting a more complex understanding of the intersubjective constitution of selfhood. He suggested that pre-reflective intersubjectivity, unspoken and “unspeakable” aspects of self-dialogue, and active psychological processes of disavowal should also be taken into account, and questions the role of the “voice” in the dialogical achievement of selfhood. However, *The Dialogical Self: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* directly addressed this critique, particularly from the developmental perspective.

A broader critical point though revolves around the limitations of fully discursively formulated dialogical knowledge in relation to the knowledge about the other vis-à-vis the self and internalized dialogical positions within the self — the central assumption in Hermans's theorizing.

This critique is most poignantly expressed by Barresi (2002), who draws attention to the fact that both James's theorizing of the self and Bakhtin's understanding of dialogism presuppose a more complex dialogical understanding of self than the one articulated by Hermans. Barresi specifically points out that Hermans draws on only a limited set of Bakhtin's works, leaving aside Bakhtin's key insight that "the radical difference exists between our understanding of self and other" (Barresi 2002: 243). These two epistemological positions can never be merged fully, even though there is a constant need to do so in order to develop both self and other understanding. The weakness that Barresi sees in Hermans's DST is "the assumption that he makes that an individual can adopt a narrative or authorial stance, somewhat above the characters that make up the polyphonic and dialogical self, and can freely move the narrative "I-position" from one character to another to give each his or her voice" (Barresi 2002: 247). Barresi points out that Bakhtin's view does not allow for such seamless integration and manipulation with various positions of "otherness" within the self. Barresi notes, "Even if the self could enclose its own past and future it could never enclose the consciousness or activity of the other. [...] The other is always an unfinished unknown" (Barresi 2002: 249). Barresi's arguments open up a way for a productive critique of Hermans's theorizing vis-à-vis Bakhtin's original ideas which will be developed in subsequent chapters.

### **Michael White and David Epston: Narrative Therapy**

While both McAdams's and Hermans's works have had important implications for therapy, initially their models were formulated in response to pressing theoretical, rather than practical, questions of the time. For White and Epston, the primary impulse to engage with the narrative paradigm came from therapeutic work itself. Working in Australia and New Zealand, and initially without any awareness of parallel developments in Europe and the US, over the 1980s and 1990s White and Epston came to formulate and refine methods of narrative therapy. It has subsequently become the therapeutic school currently growing most rapidly in popularity. White and Epston's approach is in accord with the shift of attention in the narrative study of human life from narrative as an object towards narrativity as a process. It reflects a growing understanding that both the process (narration) and its result (narrative) are crucially implicated in developing and maintaining the sense of self and forging identity. This issue becomes critical when psychology moves from theory into the domain of practice and therapy.

Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, where Michael White worked from 1983 until his death in 2008 and which now functions as a "gateway to narrative therapy and community work", gives the following definition of narrative approaches on its website:

Narrative approaches to counselling and community work centre people as the experts in their own lives and view problems as separate from people. Narrative approaches assume that people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments, and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives. The word "narrative" refers to the emphasis that is placed upon the stories of people's lives and the differences that can be made through particular tellings and retellings of these stories. Narrative approaches involve ways of understanding the stories of people's lives, and ways of re-authoring these stories in collaboration between the therapist/community worker and the people whose lives are being discussed. It is a way of working that is interested in history, the broader context that is affecting people's lives, and the ethics or politics of this work.<sup>2</sup>

David Epston (2009) dates "the birth" of narrative therapy to a workshop Michael White presented at the second Australian Family Therapy Conference in 1981 in Adelaide, even though it went un-named as such until early in the 1990s. Both practising therapists, initially working

within a family therapy framework, White and Epston formulated the main tenets of what came to be known as narrative therapy in response to issues they encountered in their practices. They also drew on a variety of sources beyond psychology in elaborating their approach, displaying, in the words of White, “profound disrespect for disciplinary boundaries” (White and Epston 1990: xvi). An important area of influence for them was anthropology; Epston was trained as an anthropologist, while White was profoundly influenced by the writings of Clifford Geertz (1976, 1986), Gregory Bateson (1974) and Edward Bruner (1986a, b). Equally important for White were Michel Foucault’s ideas, particularly those regarding the nexus of power and knowledge (Foucault 1985, 1986, 1995, 1998). Roland Barthes’s (1997a, b), Peter Brooks’s (1984) and Jacques Derrida’s (1978) ideas in literary theory, Erwin Goffman’s (1974) in sociology and Jerome Bruner’s in narrative psychology provided further points of reference for their work.

White and Epston’s 1989 book *Literate Means to Therapeutic Ends* (republished a year later as *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*) presents a narrative therapeutic model and outlines their understanding of the broader socio-cultural and political contexts that affect a person’s psychological functioning, the genesis of psychological problems and the nature of therapists’ engagements with their clients. In *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* White and Epston also elaborate an analogy that they had previously outlined in a number of single-authored articles, of therapy as a process of “storying” and/or “re-storying” of people’s lives and experiences (Epston 1985, 1986; White 1984, 1988). In particular, they draw on Bruner’s idea that narrative is constructed within a dual landscape: a landscape of action and a landscape of consciousness. The landscape of action comprises events and experiences: the who, what, where and when of a story. The landscape of consciousness encompasses the meaning that people ascribe to experiences and events and reveals how a person’s desires, values, beliefs, intentions and motives are implicated in the production of meaning.

White and Epston suggest that the particular story a person is constructing about his/her life is always selective and never includes all the facts related to this person’s functioning. When a problem-saturated story becomes dominant, people have greater and greater difficulties coping with their life, filtering problem-free experiences out of their memory and perception. Adopting Geertz’s (1973) notion of “thick description”, White and Epston develop a method of multifaceted description of human life, as a result of which other descriptions can surface and become a therapeutic resource for the reconstruction of a more effective life story.

Significantly, this narrative view of therapy is embedded within a broader framework of understanding of human functioning largely inspired by Michel Foucault’s ideas. In particular, White and Epston draw on Foucault’s understanding of power as on the one hand dominant and constraining and on the other constitutive. They emphasize that a primary effect of power is the production of a particular form of individuality, “an individuality that is, in turn, a “vehicle” of power” (White and Epston 1990: 20). They further acknowledge the particular historical form that the interaction of power and knowledge can take, maintaining that the modern form of power cannot be understood from an internal point of view. In light of these considerations, they argue that therapists, counsellors and other psychology workers are also implicated in maintaining and generating a particular power imbalance and have to accept responsibility for this. Thus, White and Epston insist that therapeutic practice is inevitably political.

The assumptions about the effect of power on the construction of subjectivity and self-knowledge penetrate deeply into White and Epston’s view of how “presenting problems”, as they are known in therapeutic practice, emerge and how they are to be treated. This is evident in their elaboration of three broad aims of therapy: the externalization of the problem; the identification of unique outcomes, and the construction of alternative stories. “Externalising”, write White and Epston, “is an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify and, at times, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive. In the process, the problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship that was previously ascribed as the problem” (1990: 38). Externalization of the problem implies simultaneous identification and separation of persons from unitary knowledges and truth discourses — including various ideological positions and diagnostic categories — that subjugate them. By means of externalizing of the problem and

generating a “thick description” persons “are able to identify previously neglected but vital aspects of lived experiences” that White, employing Goffman’s terminology, defines as “unique outcomes”. Unique outcomes present evidence of defiance of the power of the problem, and become instrumental in generating new meaning. Furthermore, following Bruner’s argument, White insists that the process of narrative therapy should aim to “initiate performances of meaning rather than actually formulating meaning [itself]” (Bruner quoted in White and Epston 1990: 79). Thus, the provision of space for the performance of alternative, previously neglected or subjugated knowledges is central to the therapeutic endeavour.

In a number of later works White and Epston develop and refine the principles and methods of narrative therapy, including re-authoring and re-membering conversations, definitional and outsider witness ceremonies, and using written documents — letters, certificates and poetry (Epston 1997). In doing so they further draw on poststructuralist ideas regarding the constitution of lives and the role of discursive and textual practices (White 1997). In White’s final book *Maps of Narrative Practice* (2007) he extends his conceptual apparatus by drawing on Lev Vygotsky’s (1986) cultural-historical theory and introducing a general principle of scaffolding as a main axis that undergirds the therapeutic engagement. The concept of “scaffolding” is derived from Vygotsky’s ideas about semiotic mediation and interiorization, as well as the notion of the zone of proximal development. Noting that people generally consult therapists when they are having difficulty in proceeding with their lives and might need to start thinking about and experimenting with what might be possible rather than what is familiar and known, White defines the gap between the two as a “zone of proximal development”. In the context of therapeutic practice, “[t]his zone can be traversed through conversation partnerships that provide the necessary scaffolding to achieve this — that is, the sort of scaffolding that provides the opportunity for people to proceed across this zone in manageable steps” (White 2007: 263). At the same time, White reiterates his commitment to Bateson’s metaphor of “maps”, but extends its use to encompass not only our knowledge of the world carried in the form of mental “maps” of external or objective reality, but also to point essentially to “destinations that could not have been specified ahead of the journey, via routes that could not have been predetermined” (White 2007: 5). During the same period (towards the end of the first decade of the new century), Epston begins to explore possible therapeutic implications of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the polyphonic novel, focusing particularly on the mechanism of sideshadowing — an exploration of possibilities implicitly present in the story — to complement the technique of “thick” description.<sup>3</sup>

Since the publication of *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, narrative therapy has been successfully applied in a number of settings: communities, organizations, penal institutions, and schools (Denborough 1996; White and Denborough 1999). It proved to be a powerful tool for engaging with a wide range of issues: family discord and violence, child abuse, addiction, trauma, loss, grief and bereavement, and the experience of personal failure (Jenkins 1990; White 2004a, b). At the same time narrative therapy has begun to be employed to address a number of issues within indigenous communities (Wingard and Lester 2001). Narrative therapy has forged productive alliances with feminist approaches and queer counselling, and maintained a constructive theoretical engagement with a number of critical issues in family therapy and beyond (Freedman and Combs 1996; Morgan 2000). Last but not least, narrative therapy has provided a useful vocabulary for a self-reflexive analysis of therapists’ own positions (Denborough 2002; Hales and White 1997; White 2001; Yuen and White 2007).

At the same time, narrative therapy has generated considerable debates and attracted various criticisms. One of the fundamental criticisms was formulated by Minuchin (1998) who argued that narrative therapy disregards theoretically informed, systemic ways of thinking. He notes that few theoretical constructs in the narrative therapy approach address personality structure or family interaction.

Mark Hayward (2003) documents and rebuffs other specific concerns raised with regard to narrative therapy. He observes that narrative therapists have been accused of devising and imposing their own language, which remains opaque for the uninitiated. However, Hayward points out that “[e]normous care often seems to have gone into White’s construction of ideas and

terms of description so that highly specific but counter-cultural notions and whole different ways of thinking can be apprehended using familiar words in unfamiliar sequences and juxtapositions" (Hayward 2003: 186). In defence of White and Epston's way of expression Hayward further suggests that if we accept that language is instrumental in producing certain perspectives as well as reflecting them, then the articulation of the innovative practice that White and Epston devised would require a different language by necessity.

A further criticism levelled at the narrative therapy movement is that it has tended to make gurus of its leaders, while its leading proponents are dismissive of most other types of therapy, positing narrative therapy as the best solution to a broad range of problems. This criticism goes hand in hand with the point that the role of the individual therapist, with his or her personal opinions and biases, is not sufficiently acknowledged in narrative therapy (Doan 1998).

Another broad criticism raises the issue of whether narrative therapy can meet conventional research standards (quantitative and qualitative). There is an alleged lack of evidence-based research assessing the real effects and outcomes of narrative practices. Etchison and Kleist (2000) note that narrative therapy's focus on *qualitative* outcomes is not congruent with larger *quantitative* research and findings that are typically sought or presented in scholarly research today. From the position of academic psychology, this constitutes a lack of empirical evidence on the basis of which critical judgements regarding the efficacy of narrative therapy can be made. Yet Busch, Strong and Lock (2011) argue that the idea of narrative therapy being standardized in order to be evaluated using the same criteria as evidence-based psychotherapy is deeply misleading as it does not acknowledge the radical differences in their respective epistemological and theoretical commitments. These authors propose that "researchers need to evaluate narrative therapy through the epistemological stances that theoretically constitute it" (Busch et al. 2011: 50). This suggestion can serve to open analytical possibilities for more congruent reading of White and Epston's approach and is taken as a point of departure in the present analysis.

### **Narrative Psychology. Limitations, Tensions and Challenges**

While McAdams, Hermans, and White and Epston all share a commitment to the narrative approach, their respective positions are markedly different in terms of theoretical assumptions, goals, values and procedures. This reflects broader tensions that characterize contemporary narrative psychology. In order to provide a map for scholars trying to navigate this complex field, Brett Smith and Andrew Sparkes (2006) identify eight significant conceptual contradictions underlying narrative research, which they further group into three themes. Theme one addresses "narrative and the self" and encompasses the relation between narrative and selfhood; the unity of self; and the coherence of self. Theme two focuses on the "ontology or nature of narrative" and comprises tensions arising from different positions with regards to (neo)realism versus relativism; interiority versus externality; and the use of the notion of constructivism. Theme three addresses conflicting methodological approaches to narrative research.

With regard to the first theme, the relationship between narrative and self, Smith and Sparkes point out that some narrative researchers view narrative and self as inseparable or identical, advancing the position that either the narrative is our identity, or that a self or identity is narrative. By contrast, other researchers argue that drawing equivalence between narrative and identity runs the risk of linguistic reductionism and take the position that self is instead produced in the process of telling of stories.

The second tension within this theme concerns the issue of unity of self, with some researchers arguing for a unified and purposeful self, imbued with integrating and synthesizing capacities, while others see self as multiple, fragmented and unfinished. From this perspective identity is understood as a "performative struggle, always destabilised and deferred" (Smith and Sparkes 2006: 175).

A third tension concerns the issue of temporal coherence. While one camp of narrative psychologists insists that there is an inherent demand for a coherent and stable psychological

identity, another allows for temporal discontinuity and fragmentation. These scholars tend to conceptualize coherence as an accomplishment, relational and interactional.

Theme two focuses on the “ontology or nature of narrative” and comprises tensions arising from different positions with regards to (neo)realism versus relativism; interiority versus externality; and the use of the notion of constructivism. The debates concerning the (neo)realist understanding of self versus the relativist perspective are grounded in two opposing views. The (neo)realists are committed to the view that there is a reality out there, “independent of us, which can be known — at least in principle” (Smith and Sparkes 2006: 178). Against this view, the relativist position argues that no claims can be made “for the existence of foundations, of a reality outside of ourselves that can be known objectively through, for example, the appropriate use of procedures or techniques” (Smith and Sparkes 2006: 179). According to the latter, then, theory-free observation or knowledge is impossible; knowledge — including our understanding of self, identity and subjectivity — is always socially constructed and always fallible.

Closely connected to the tension between (neo)realist and relativist perspectives is the issue of how much weight is given to the “individual”, “subjectivity”, “experience”, and the “personal and real” or “natural” selves in a particular narrative perspective. Some scholars insist on preserving some sense of interiority, privileging the active engagement of the individual person in the process of self-construction and acknowledging the “real” nature of individual subjectivity. Other narrative researchers, however, challenge and undermine the recourse to real inner core and emphasize the social aspects of narrative in the formation of the self, such as the fact that identities are constructed in situated relationships and depend on social positioning. Furthermore, these scholars underline the use of semiotic practices and linguistic resources on which individuals draw when constructing their self.

Smith and Sparkes further illuminate a related tension surrounding the use of the word “construction” in different narrative perspectives. For those scholars who insist on the given core or authentic subjectivity, the self can be described as a natural phenomenon, which can be “found” in the inner depths of one’s consciousness where it was waiting to be discovered and revealed to the world. By comparison, scholars who theorize the process of narrative identity formation using the concept of construction demonstrate quite a different understanding: for them there is no private, interior self to be discovered; the self is produced and formed through a variety of social and semantic practices. An important implication of a constructivist view is that it allows greater freedom to re-construct and re-arrange the sense of self, thus “granting people the greatest opportunities and possible freedoms for transformation” (Smith and Sparkes 2006: 183).

Finally, theme three reflects on various methodologies employed in narrative research and outlines two tensions: between the “what” and the “how” in narrative research practice, and between privileging the position of a story analysand versus the position of storyteller.

Building on the critical analytical framework proposed by Smith and Sparkes, in this book I map these three themes onto the change from the modern to the postmodern paradigm, which allows me not only to identify the tensions, but also to explore their nature and the reasons behind them. Thus, it can be argued that the modern position encompasses the perspective of ontological realism — the view that there is a reality out there, including the reality of self and subjectivity, which can be objectively known. It further entails that there is a core self or natural, inner self that can be discovered, and this self is characterized by unity and coherence. This modern perspective tends to adopt methodology that privileges the study of the “what” of narrative and the position of the researcher, rather than a storyteller, while bracketing the impact of the methodological procedure on the behaviour and materials collected.

The postmodern perspective assumes a world of multiple, “mind-dependent” realities and embraces epistemological constructivism. This perspective denies the possibility of theory-free knowledge and “objective” observation. It doesn’t assume there is a natural, real, given self which can be discovered — rather, identities are something that people construct, produce and perform in different contexts in relation to a particular situated audience. Such identities are non-unitary, and characterized by fragmentation, multiplicity, and context-specificity. They also lack

coherence and allow for flexibility and temporal discontinuity. The postmodern perspective further foregrounds methodological procedures, acknowledging their constitutive impact on the studied phenomena. It privileges the “how” of narrative research and the position of a storyteller rather than a researcher.

I then explore how these themes unfold within McAdams’s approach, Hermans’s dialogical self theory, and White and Epston’s narrative therapy, and, further, offer an analysis of tensions that exist between the ethical implications of each of these approaches. In doing so I also engage with the broader criticisms that are raised with regard to narrative psychology as “an ontological and epistemological framework on the nature of lives as “storied” (Smith and Sparkes 2006: 171).

James Phelan (2005) warns against a trend that he defines as “narrative imperialism”: “the impulse by students of narrative to claim more and more territory and more and more power for our object of study and our ways of studying it” (Phelan 2005: 206). Closely related to the warning against the risk of the “narrative imperialism” is a critique that highlights the ethnocentric nature of narrative. As Brian Schiff notes in his 2006 article “The Promise (and Challenge) of an Innovative Narrative Psychology”:

In describing our project as narrative, we are reifying a Western, arguably middle and upper class, concept as the universal mode of shaping and articulating subjective experience. The narrative metaphor has wide intellectual currency in our literate culture where autobiographies and memoirs are common technologies for organizing experience, making known our insides, and carving out a place for ourselves in the social worlds. These vehicles are accepted and available in our daily life, that’s why the metaphor is so compelling. (Schiff 2006: 21)

Schiff goes on to suggest that the scope and mode of applicability of the narrative metaphor should be clearly delineated and it should be acknowledged that narrative can be expressed in a variety of media: through painting, dance, performance, song, etc.

Perhaps the most forceful criticism of narrative in general has been articulated by Galen Strawson, who delineated the *psychological narrativity thesis*, according to which “human beings typically see or live or experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort, or at least a collection of stories”, and the *ethical narrativity thesis*, that “states that experiencing or conceiving one’s life as a narrative is a good thing; a richly Narrative outlook is essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood” (Strawson 2004: 428). Strawson argues that both theses, and any combination of them, are false, and insists that the view that supports them is particularly regrettable: “It’s just not true that there is only one good way for human beings to experience their being in time. There are deeply non-Narrative people and there are good ways to live that are deeply non-Narrative” (Strawson 2004: 429). In Strawson’s view, the narrative perspective hinders human self-understanding, closes down an important avenue of thought, impoverishes our grasp of ethical possibilities, needlessly and wrongly distresses those who don’t fit this model, and is potentially destructive in psychotherapeutic contexts. Strawson suggests that there are other ways of psychological functioning, such as the episodic non-narrative mode. The core of Strawson’s criticism seems to be aimed at the notion that narrativity as a principle of psychological operation is natural and universal: “The aspiration to explicit narrative self-articulation is natural for some — for some, it may even be helpful — but in others is highly unnatural and ruinous” (Strawson 2004: 447). Such criticism raises the valid concern of whether narrativity can be posited as a natural ability inherent in and beneficial for all human beings.

The analysis that is offered in this book aims to respond to Strawson’s criticism. The exploration of the *psychological narrativity thesis*, i.e. the assumptions about the narrative subject, and the analysis of the *ethical narrativity thesis* bookend my project. However, the close investigation of the three main streams of narrative psychology offered in this book shows that various approaches sharing broad narrative perspective can differ substantially in their assumptions about the given versus constructed nature of the human ability to create and mobilize narrative in different aspects of their psychological functioning. While all three approaches interrogated in the present study can be appropriately located under the umbrella-term of “narrative psychology”, their particular use of narrative and narrativity differ substantially depending on their ontological and

epistemological assumptions. The foundational aspect where such differences become obvious is the use of narrative in relation to self, identity and subjectivity. The next chapter offers a discussion of how narrative is positioned with regard to the subject by McAdams, Hermans, and Epston and White in their theoretical and practical work.

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## 2. CONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVE SUBJECT

### The Critique of the Subject and the Challenge of Fragmentation

The various narrative conceptualizations of the subject critically examined in this chapter are formulated—implicitly or explicitly—in response to the debate concerning the “idea of a substantial self, including the sense that there is a creative force within”, which is generally characterized as the question defining the difference between the postmodern and modern view of the subject (Simon 1999: 57). It is therefore instructive to sketch briefly the broader context of philosophical and psychological discussion regarding the category of the subject in which specifically narrative formulations of the subject have emerged.

The critique of the subject has been one of the most significant lines of philosophical inquiry through the course of the twentieth century. The critique was articulated from a variety of perspectives such as Marxism and psychoanalysis and has been influenced by work in a range of disciplines, including linguistics and the social sciences in general. It was also intensified by the historical and political experience of the twentieth century: the wars, the totalitarian regimes, the camps, decolonization and the birth of new nations, the acceleration of cultural production and saturation of signs, to name the most obvious factors.

Such critique has found one of its most powerful expressions in the work of Michel Foucault, who, building on aspects of both Freudian and Marxist inquiry, argues “that the subject can’t pre-exist the social order, or be the source of meaning, because it is itself constituted by dominant social rules” (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000: 122). These rules vary historically and culturally and are bound up with specific configurations of power, which are instrumental in producing particular forms of subjectivity. From this, Foucault proceeds to formulate his famous prediction regarding “the death of the subject”:

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. [...] As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared [...] then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea. (Foucault 1970: 386—387)

Foucault’s work on subjectivity and power as applied to such questions as madness, social discipline, body-image, truth and normative sexuality was instrumental in establishing the postmodern intellectual landscape, where anxiety regarding the “death of the subject” continues to reverberate powerfully. Towards the end of the last century this anxiety was poignantly expressed by Jean-Luc Nancy when he raised the question, “Who comes after the subject?” which he addressed to the leading philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century, including, among others, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou and Emanuel Levinas. Their answers formed the much celebrated volume of the same title, which was published in 1991. The way Nancy formulated the question has lost none of its currency since then—we are still coming to terms with the difficult issue of, if not the death of the subject, then an altered character of subjectivity that emerged towards the end of the last century and brought us into the new one. I therefore believe it is appropriate to reproduce the passage from Nancy’s letter of invitation delineating various aspects of the problem:

*Who comes after the subject?* The question can be explained as follows: one of the major characteristics of contemporary thought is the putting into question of the instance of the “subject”, according to the structure, the meaning, and the value subsumed under this term in modern thought, from Descartes to Hegel, if not to Husserl. The inaugurating decisions of modern thought — whether they took place under the sign of a break with metaphysics and its poorly pitched questions, under the sign of “deconstruction” of this metaphysics, under that of a transference of the thinking of being to the thinking of life, or of the Other, or of language, etc. — have all involved putting subjectivity on trial. A wide spread discourse of recent date

proclaimed the subject's simple liquidation. Everything seems, however, to point to the necessity, not of a "return to the subject" (proclaimed by those who think that nothing has happened, and that there is nothing new to be thought, except maybe variations or modifications of the subject), but on the contrary, of a move forward towards someone —*some one*— else in its place (this last expression is obviously a mere convenience: "the place" could not be the same). Who would it be? How would s/he present him/herself? Can we name her/him? Is the question "who" suitable? (Nancy 1991: 5)

Derrida answers the question by linking "who" with an instance, highlighting the temporal and, in principle, interminable character of the work of defining "who"—first and foremost by a human being him/herself:

In the text or in writing, such as I have tried to analyze them at least, there is, I wouldn't say a place (and this is the who question, this topology of a certain locatable non-place, at once necessary and undiscoverable) but an instance (without stance, a "without" without negativity) for the "who", a "who" besieged by the problematic of the trace of *différance*, of affirmation, of the signature and of the so-called "proper" name, of the *je[c]t* (above all subject, object, project), as *destinerring* of missive. (Derrida 1991: 99—100)

Derrida insists that whatever is subsumed under the "who" implied in the question can only come into being by answering the question itself, which presupposes the relation to self as of *différance*, "that is to say alterity, or trace". The question itself becomes re-inscribed into experience of "an "affirmation", of a "yes" or of an "en-gage". Derrida further adds that answering such a question always presupposes *responsibility* in a sense of responding to someone:

The singularity of the "who" is not an individuality of a thing that would be identical to itself, it is not an atom. It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can *only* answer, have already answered, even if I think I am answering "no". (Derrida 1991: 100—101)

Not only the answer, but the question is performative in a very fundamental sense—it is only through this procedure that subjectivity emerges.

For Levinas too it is engagement with the other that ushers subjectivity into being:

The explication of the meaning that a self other than myself has *for me* — for my primordial self — describes the way in which the other tears me from my hypostasy, from the *here*, at the heart of being or at the centre of the world where, privileged and in this sense primordial, I posit myself. But, in this tearing, the ultimate meaning of my "me-ness" is revealed. In the collation of meaning between "me" and the other and also in my alterity to myself, an alterity through which I can confer on the other my meaning of myself, the *here* and *there* come to invert their respective meaning. (Levinas 1991: 213)

Moreover, anchoring his philosophy in the category of the other, Levinas not only posits the other as an ontological condition of the subject's being, but inscribes an ethical dimension into his system: it is an ethical relation to the other that ruptures the "egological" primordial sense of being. In fact, it "awakens" subjectivity from egoism and egotism and pushes "I" to the second level: "it is I — however manifestly primordial and hegemonic, however identical to myself, in what is "proper" to me, however comfortable in my own skin, in my *hic et nunc* — who pass to the second level: I see myself on the basis of the other, I expose myself to the other, I have accounts to render" (Levinas 1991: 213).

The ethical dimension also plays an important, perhaps overriding, role in Alain Badiou's definition of a radically decentred—in fact "objectless"—subject. Within his system rested on the categories of being and event Badiou speculates about the possibility to "de-objectify the space of the subject". For Badiou the category of subject can only make sense if it is bound up with the category of truth: "I call subject the local or finite status of truth. A subject is what is locally born out" (Badiou 1991: 25). Truth for Badiou does not reside in "knowledge", and his understanding of truth goes well beyond the critique of correspondence theories of truth and the hermeneutics

of unveiling. Truth for Badiou rather “hangs” on the question of being, and, more accurately, depends on the “supplementation or exceeding-of-being” that he terms *event*. It is in departing from these assumptions that Badiou arrives at the following definition of the subject: “The subject is *woven* out of truth, it is what exists of truth in limited fragments. A subject is that which truth passes through, or this finite point through which, in its infinite being, truth itself passes. This transit excludes every interior moment” (Badiou 1991: 25).

Gilles Deleuze in his response highlights another shift in the emerging understanding of the subject—a tendency to focus on singularity, corresponding to the growing attention to singularization in various fields of knowledge. For Deleuze, singularity is not only something that is opposed to the universal, but also “some element that can be extended close to another, so as to obtain a connection”. He notes the tendency for knowledge or beliefs to be replaced by notions like “arrangements” or “contrivance”. He argues that the function of singularity replaces that of universality and philosophy becomes “*a theory of multiplicities* that refers to no subject as preliminary unity”. He concludes that “the notion of subject has lost much of its interest on behalf of *pre-individual singularities and non-personal individuations*” (Deleuze 1991: 95).

Disparate and unique as they are, these various philosophical positions insist on a need for a re-conceptualization of the category of the subject, while opposing a nihilistic position of rejecting the category *tout court*. They locate the problematics of the subject not within the oppositions of essence and presence and universal and particular, but singularity and multiplicity. Singularity is defined through the embeddedness of the individual within a particular environment, connectedness and extension. The subject can be further constructively defined through time—the instance of emerging—rather than tied to a particular structural position. The subject or subjectivity cannot be understood productively within the limits and boundaries of an individual—they are embedded in the real context of its existence, which is community. Such context broadly understood creates a condition for emerging subjectivity and calls it into being. Such contextual understanding of the subject also presupposes—explicitly or implicitly—a moral or ethical dimension.

The anxiety regarding the “death of the subject” resonated deeply through various areas of the humanities. To use the terminology of the key sociologist of postmodernism, Zigmund Bauman, life towards the end of the twentieth century became increasingly “liquid”:

Liquid life is consuming life. It casts the world and all its animate and inanimate fragments as objects of consumption: that is, objects that lose their usefulness (and so their lustre, attraction, seductive power and worth) in the course of being used. It shapes the judging and evaluating of all the animate and inanimate fragments of the world after the pattern of objects of consumption. (Bauman 2005: 9)

In this radically destabilized “liquid” world geared towards the consumer market, identity as a solid stable core ceases to be of value—it contradicts the dominant logic of the unfolding of life as a cycle of production/consumption through a multitude of short-lived choices, and becomes not only unattainable but undesirable. The “liquid” world needs as its counterpart a “liquid” identity:

The sole “identity core” which one can be sure will emerge from the continuous change not only unscathed but probably even reinforced is that of *homo eligens* — the “man choosing” (though not the “man who *has chosen*”!): a permanently impermanent self, completely incomplete, definitely indefinite — and authentically unauthentic. (Bauman 2005: 33)

Concurrently, theorizing of and research on the self in academic and practising psychology started to challenge the idea of a unified essential self. The 1980s witnessed the growth of studies focusing on the experience of fragmentation, disintegration and emptiness of self. Reported trends in psychopathology attested to a growing instability of self. Disorders that have “identity disturbance” among their core features, such as borderline personality disorder and eating disorders, which were once of peripheral importance in psychiatric diagnostic systems, reached almost epidemic proportions by the end of the twentieth century. Multiple personality disorder, or dissociative identity disorder, has also been on the rise, demonstrating not only a dramatic

increase in diagnoses but also the increase in the number of “alternative personalities”, at some extremes reaching hundreds (Putman 1989). The growing phenomenology of disintegration was reflected in a variety of terminological definitions such as “the empty self” (Cushman 1990), “the decentralized identity” (Sampson 1985), “the quantum self” (Zohar 1990), and “the saturated self” (Gergen 1991). Reflecting the value judgement of a particular researcher, the continuum stretched from “shattered self” on the negative pole to the “protean self” (Lifton 1993) on the positive one.

The latter entered into mainstream psychology discourse as a powerful presence after the American psychiatrist Robert Lifton published his book *The Protean Self* in 1993. Through the “protean” metaphor Lifton tried to capture the sense of fluidity and continuous psychic re-creation that has become definitive for the experience of self in the late twentieth century. It allowed him to highlight the blending of radical fluidity, functional wisdom and a quest for at least minimal form. According to Lifton, the release of proteanism was brought about by three main forces: “historical dislocation, the mass media revolution and the threat of extinction” (Lifton 1993: 14). Lifton’s “protean self” is thoroughly postmodern—with the author himself acknowledging the conceptual indebtedness. It is a self in a constant state of flux, made up of “odd combinations”, ushered into being by the sense of fatherlessness and homelessness, “lubricating” its everyday experience with irony and plagued by myriads of anxieties. At the same time the protean self is described by Lifton as constantly “shape searching”, demonstrating various forms that “human resilience” takes in the age of fragmentation. Thus Lifton strives to construct a differentiated but functioning self.

In Kenneth Gergen’s analysis of the postmodern form of self, saturation has become a leading theme. For Gergen the postmodern development represents a result of the accumulated technologies of the twentieth century that radically changed the ease, scope, intensity and speed of communication and, by implication, human interconnectedness. Gergen describes such technological advances as “the technologies of social saturation” and attributed to their operation the “postmodern erosion of self”. The process of social saturation “immerses us ever more deeply in the social world, and exposes us more and more to the opinions, values, and lifestyles of others” (Gergen 1991: 49). Within social saturation generally Gergen delineated two aspects: “a populating of the self” and “a multiphrenic condition”. A populating of the self results from our exposure to “an enormous range of persons, the new forms of relationship, unique circumstances and opportunity, and special intensities of feelings” and represents the infusion of partial identities. Multiphrenia represents partially an outcome of self-population, and partly stems “from the populated self’s efforts to exploit the potential of the technologies of relationship” (Gergen 1991: 74). Multiphrenia refers to the “splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments” with ensuing vertigo of unlimited possibilities. Yet a multiphrenic condition is not defined as pathological by Gergen. On the contrary, it is often suffused with a sense of expansiveness and adventure. It indicates a radically new parameter of the postmodern consciousness, which might with time become just a normal way of psychological operating. The general thrust of Gergen’s theorizing is that while a shift from the modern to the postmodern context does destabilize the individual bounded self, in its place a new sense of self develops:

In this era the self is redefined as no longer an essence in itself, but relational. In the postmodern world, selves may become the manifestation of relationship, thus placing relationships in the central position occupied by the individual self for the last several hundred years of Western history. (Gergen 1991: 147)

This shift from a unified view of self, identity and consciousness to a more heterogeneous and fragmented one was paralleled on a metatheoretical level by the growing compartmentalization of research in psychology at large, the fragmentation not only within but among theories, as Martin and Barresi show in their insightful and definitive analysis of the discourses addressing soul and self during the 2000 years from antiquity to the present day (Martin and Barresi 2006: 297). They highlight that late twentieth-century psychological theorizing and research tended to focus not on the self as such, but on one of its many hyphenated roles, such as self-image, self-perception, self-conception, self-discovery, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-reference, self-modelling, self-consciousness, self-interest, self-persistence, self-

control, self-denial, self-deception and self-actualization. As Martin and Barresi note further, the ontological status of these various hyphenated notions of self was often unspecified and there has been no concerted attempt to unify these self-theories with one another.

Martin and Barresi conclude that “by the end of the twentieth century the unified self died the death if not of a thousand qualifications, then of a thousand hyphenations” (Martin and Barresi 2006: 297). They consequently ask, “Is fragmentation, then, the end of the story?” and outline two possible answers: one is that the theoretical fragmentation can be more constructively and optimistically characterized as “healthy pluralism” (Martin and Barresi 2006: 301). The second possibility would stem from the realization that “a unified self is not something that we once had and then lost sight of but, rather, something that we never had to begin with” (Martin and Barresi 2006: 301). From this point of view, “a better way of characterizing what happened as a consequence of the development of theory is not that we lost something valuable that we once had but that we became better positioned to shed an illusion and finally see what we had — and have — for what it truly is” (Martin and Barresi 2006: 301).

It is in this context that various strands of narrative psychology—the model of identity as life story, the dialogical self theory (DST) and narrative therapy—deliver their articulation of the categories of self, subjectivity and subject. Inevitably, thus, narrative theorists had to take their stand on a continuum stretching from “optimistically universalisable Kantian assumptions” and the self conceived as “capable of being autonomous, rational, and centred, and somehow free of any *particular* cultural, ethnic, or gendered characteristics” (Butler 2002: 59) to the view that the idea of a unified self is no more than an illusion. The critical question, thus, is what narrative psychology can offer in the way of conceptualization of the subject to respond to the challenges posed by the postmodern conception of self and subject: can narrative form maintain decentredness without disintegration, providing a solution to the problem of the fragmented self? Can narrative psychology offer a more promising way to address the problem of agency and coherence in light of increasing fragmentation?

## **Life Story: Identity, Subject and Subjectivity in McAdams's Approach**

McAdams has throughout the course of his scientific career consistently rejected postmodern views and attacked the postmodern appropriation of the concept of narrative. He writes in *The Redemptive Self*:

The concept of narrative is key in the psychological writings of postmodern thinkers. Lives are like texts, they suggest, narratives that continue to be written and rewritten over time. But what are texts? They are nothing but patterns of words, pictures, signs, and other sorts of representations. There is nothing substantially “real” about them. (McAdams 2006c: 296)

McAdams directs this critique specifically against Kenneth Gergen, as one of the major proponents of a postmodern perspective in psychology. McAdams explicitly contrasts his own view on the self and identity with Gergen’s position expressed in his *The Saturated Self*:

Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to a reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The centre fails to hold. (Gergen 1991 cited in McAdams 2006c: 342)

McAdams formulates his approach to the subject in sharp contrast to postmodern appropriations of the notion of narrative and mobilization of it to theorize identity and subjectivity. In responding to postmodern critique, McAdams reiterates his commitment to modern values and assumptions in the concluding paragraph to *The Redemptive Self*:

If I thought life narratives signified nothing beyond the swirl and confusion of contemporary life, however, I would not study them. If I thought that American adults themselves were not the real authors of their own stories, appropriating discourses and narratives that prevail in their own culture [...], I would not assert that narrative identities provide lives with some degree of unity

and purpose while offering insights, as well, into culture. No matter how messy it gets out there, people want to make sense of it all. Life-story telling continues apace. (McAdams 2006c: 298)

This commitment creates a unifying theme that has run throughout McAdams's research for more than a quarter of a century.

Reflecting on the relationship between identity and historical periods in 1996, McAdams asserted that the storied self is a modern phenomenon that emerges in response to "the particular problems and challenges in selfhood posed by modernity" (McAdams 1996: 297). These challenges are evident in repeated doubts that Western men and women have expressed since the early 1800s "about the extent to which they experience themselves as (a) essentially the same person from one situation to the next one over time and (b) a unique and integrated person who is consistently different as well as related to other unique persons in the environment" (McAdams 1996: 297). In response to these questions modern Westerners engage in a reflexive project of articulating their multi-layered "selves" in narrative form encompassed by the direction of progress and self-improvement over time. He further concedes that these selves are seeking self-actualization, self-realization, self-fulfilment and even self-transcendence. McAdams suggested that these tendencies continue to encompass identity-building efforts of contemporary Westerners despite some authors arguing that Western societies have entered the postmodern era.

McAdams (1993) articulated his narrative view of identity most fully in his monograph *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myth and the Making of the Self*. While the origins of this book can be traced to his first scholarly book *Power, Intimacy and the Life Story* (McAdams 1985), McAdams reached a new level of engagement with the idea of life story in the 1990s. Starting with an argument that each of us comes to know who he or she is by creating a heroic story of the self, a personal myth, McAdams put forward an elaborate narrative model of identity encompassing past, present and future and characterized by plot, characters, scenes and a particular aesthetic. Introducing this idea by asking "What is a personal myth?" McAdams stated:

First and foremost, it is a kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole. Like all stories, the personal myth has a beginning, middle, and end, defined according to the development of plot and character. We attempt, with our story, to make a compelling aesthetic statement. (McAdams 1993: 12)

As rich and inspirational as it is, this definition also reveals the underlying tension in McAdams's model that comes powerfully to colour his later research and that bears directly on the understanding of the category of subject that his model presupposes. This is the tension between essentialist and constructivist assumptions, betrayed most clearly by the paradoxical statement that each of us "naturally constructs" a myth. The tension between the given and produced, the natural and cultural, indicates the two poles in McAdams's theorizing to which he returns time and again in an attempt to reconcile them, or rather—as the later analysis demonstrates—to subsume one within the other.

Initially McAdams located his model of identity as a story or myth within his three-level model of personality (presented in Chap. 2) encompassing the level of dispositional traits, the level of personal concerns and the level of life narrative. This model of personality was described by McAdams as structurally complex and comprising a set of heterogeneous psychological characteristics not subordinated to a hierarchical relationship. However, within this model, identity as a life story is responsible for provision of coherence with regard to a self-perceived account of the person's life and is also critically implicated in integrating the work of different levels within the personality. Thus, McAdams characterized identity by bounding and masterful qualities—an orientation that over time becomes even more pronounced in his work.

Furthermore, as Vollmer (2005) notes, identity for McAdams is hidden inside of us. It is based on material that has been "gathered" beforehand: "Even before we consciously know what a story is, we are gathering material for a self-defining story we will someday compose" (McAdams 1993: 13). The self, for McAdams, is discovered when this unconscious story is brought to light and made explicit through narrative. As Vollmer explains, McAdams posits that "what we do

when we explicitly tell or write a story, is not an act of creating our self, but an act of *describing* something that has already been created, of revealing what is already there but hidden" (Vollmer 2005: 202).

Vollmer highlights that the essentialism of McAdams's position is also evident in his idea that self-descriptive stories convey the truth about the inner self, the truth that has been known to the teller all along. The sense of self is given and clearly pre-dates its narrative rendering: as McAdams concedes, the story is "there all along, inside the mind. It is a psychological structure that evolves slowly over time, infusing life with unity and purpose. An interview can elicit aspects of that, offering me hints concerning the truth already in place in the mind of the teller" (McAdams 1993: 20). Importantly, narrative capacity as such and narrative as a form of organizing the flow of experience and consciousness represent a *given* for McAdams as well.

Over the following years McAdams expanded his initial model of personality and introduced the "New Big Five" fundamental principles for an integrative science of personality (McAdams and Pals 2006). In elaborating these "New Big Five" McAdams strives to locate his understanding of self, identity and personality within a broader framework encompassed by *evolutionary* determinants. Noting that most grand theories of personality advanced in the first half of the twentieth century (psychoanalytic theory, humanistic psychology, and the cognitive-behavioural approach) are essentially "faith-based systems whose first principles are untested and untestable" (McAdams and Pals 2006: 205), McAdams and Pals suggest that "an integrative science of persons should be built around a first principle that enjoys the imprimatur of the biological sciences" (McAdams and Pals 2006: 205). Thus, the first principle of the "New Big Five" is that,

Personality psychology begins with human nature, and from the standpoint of the biological sciences, human nature is best couched in terms of human evolution. To the extent that the individual person is like all other persons, that deep similarity is likely to be a product of human evolution. (McAdams and Pals 2006: 206)

The second principle within the "New Big Five" approach correlates with Level I of the personality model McAdams had introduced earlier and relates to the dispositional signature of the person: those "broad, nonconditional, decontextualized, generally linear and bipolar, and implicitly comparative dimensions of human individuality that go by such names as extraversion, dominance, friendliness, dutifulness, depressiveness, the tendency to feel vulnerable and so on" (McAdams and Pals 2006: 207). Principle 2 maintains that, "Variations on a small set of broad dispositional traits implicated in social life (both in the EEA [environment of evolutionary adaptedness] and today) constitute the most stable and recognizable aspect of psychological individuality" (McAdams and Pals 2006: 207).

Principle 3 invokes the characteristic adaptations (constructs that were previously located by McAdams on Level II of his personality model) such as motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues and schema. This principle states that "beyond dispositional traits, human lives vary with respect to a wide range of motivational, socio-cognitive, and developmental adaptations, contextualised in time, place, and/or social role" (McAdams and Pals 2006: 208). This principle speaks to a domain of human individuality that is more closely linked to motivation and cognition than are traits, and seems more amenable to environmental and cultural influences.

Principle 4 grounds the concept of narrative as a new root metaphor in psychology and argues that, "beyond dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations, human lives vary with respect to the integrative life stories, or personal narratives, that individuals construct to make meaning and identity in the modern world" (McAdams and Pals 2006: 209). This principle reiterates McAdams's original insight that "*[n]arrative identity* is indeed that story the person tries to "keep going"—an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past and the imagined future into a more or less coherent whole in order to provide the person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning" (McAdams and Pals 2006: 209—210). Narrative identity is thus responsible for continuity and coherence and, furthermore, is critically implicated in psychological growth, development, coping and well-being.

While Principles 2, 3 and 4 replicate McAdams's earlier thinking on personality, Principles 1 and 5 expand his framework by grounding personality analysis within two contextual domains of a different order—evolution and culture. McAdams thus concludes that, “A full accounting of a person's life requires an examination of the unique patterning of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and life narratives that characterize that life, all grounded ultimately in the evolutionary demands of the species and, at the same time, complexly influenced by culture” (McAdams and Pals 2006: 210).

Incorporating culture as Principle 5 in his approach, McAdams points out that this dimension remains traditionally underappreciated in personality psychology, while for him it offers important cues in discerning the effects of environment on individual differences:

Culture exerts different effects on different levels of personality: It exerts a modest effect on the phenotypic expression of traits; it shows a stronger impact on the content and timing of characteristic adaptations; and it reveals its deepest and most profound influence on life stories, essentially providing a menu of themes, images, and plots for the psychosocial construction of narrative identity. (McAdams and Pals 2006: 211)

McAdams presents the “New Big Five” principles as a significant step forward for personality psychology dominated previously by the “Big Five” traits model. However, one of the limitations of the “New Big Five” principles is that they outline five broad domains but not the functional relationship between them. What holds these domains together is that they firmly focus on an individual self. The five domains can be thought of as gradually enlarging concentric circles all centred on an individual, who draws material for personality development from evolutionary, cultural, dispositional and other resources. Both evolutionary and cultural domains provide a range of options to choose from as well as a set of constraints, yet they are not determinative of the individual. In contrast to the traditional self, where the subject is defined in terms of its relation to the wider order beyond it, and to the postmodern self, where culture provides a powerful decentring force, in the “New Big Five” the subject is self-defining. The subject is imbued with agentic and reflexive power and reigns in the universe that is neatly arranged around him.

As such, McAdams's “New Big Five” intervention is clearly anchored in a modern view of individuality, not engaging into the debates ushered by Clifford Geertz's powerful argument that “[t]he Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures” (Geertz 1979: 229).

McAdams's emphasis on the synthesis and integration of the self as key functions of narrative identity further demonstrates his broader allegiance to modernist assumptions in psychology. McAdams attributes particular importance to the internal coherence of the life story:

People construct stories to make sense of their lives; therapists and their clients co-construct new narratives to replace disorganized or incoherent stories of self; lives become meaningful and coherent (or not) amidst the welter of social constructions and discourses that comprise contemporary postmodern life. It follows, furthermore, that story construction — at the level of the individual, group, and even culture — moves (ideally) in the direction of coherence. (McAdams 2006a: 110)

McAdams further provides arguments in support of the view that narrative coherence represents an ideal—or at least desirable—pole of identity construction. First and foremost, he notes, since stories exist to be told, they need to be understood—and thus they need to comply with certain culturally produced expectations regarding time, intention, goals, causality and closure. Thus, narrative coherence promotes communication, while lack of coherence hinders it. Further, coherence is instrumental in assisting a generation of causal explanation, which for McAdams represents another important function of life narrative: “If a life story is to make psychological sense, then, it must explain how a person came to be (and who a person may be in the future)” (McAdams 2006a: 114). McAdams refers to Habermas and Bluck's (2000) identification of four

types of coherence inhering in the development of narratively organized identity: temporal, autobiographical, causal and thematic. McAdams stresses the importance of autobiographical coherence, which encompasses “implicit understanding of the typical events and their timing that go into the construction of a typical life story” (Habermas and Bluck 2000: 115).

McAdams notes that narrative coherence has its limits and often faces challenges. This is particularly the case in the therapeutic domain, where the presentation of confused, incomprehensible and disordered stories, populated by multiple unstable characters with unclear goals and unstable drives, is a widespread phenomenon. However, for McAdams such experiences are no more than deviation from an optimal psychological development: “When the self’s synthesizing powers break down, therapists need to help patients construct stories with fewer characters and simpler plots, in the hope that more coherent life stories will translate into more coherent and more effective lived experience” (McAdams 2006a: 120). On the other hand, even highly coherent life stories can be unhelpful, for example when they are handed down by parents and uncritically assimilated into identity structure by children. Thus, McAdams acknowledges that judging a life story as coherent and therefore efficient always relies on a recognizable moral perspective. But for McAdams himself, there is no doubt as to where his moral and ethical commitments lie and how they translate into his theory. As Smith and Sparkes observe, for McAdams “the degree to which different parts of a story fit together in some consistent and orderly way is a key criterion of its meaningfulness” (Smith and Sparkes 2006: 176). Furthermore, the “degree to which this criterion is achieved in an individual’s life story may also be evaluated in moral terms as an index of personal adequacy, positive mental health, and of a positively valued identity” (Smith and Sparkes 2006: 176).

This becomes particularly evident in McAdams’s elaboration of the idea of the *redemptive self*. According to McAdams, both on a broad societal scale and in individuals’ private lives, a significant proportion of Americans are motivated by the idea of transforming their suffering into a positive emotional state, by the belief that a move from pain and peril to redemption is not only possible, but inevitable. The development of *redemptive* identity is driven not only by the urge to the realization of the self’s full potential, but also by the push to become our best selves.

McAdams’s conclusions are based on hundreds of interviews with caring and productive American adults who demonstrate a strong commitment to their careers, their families and making a positive difference in the world. These highly “generative” men and women embrace the negative things that happen to them. In their view, by transforming the bad into good they are able to move forward in life and ultimately leave something positive behind. While there is no indication as to what percentage of Americans fall into this category, for McAdams the results are sufficient to suggest that these respondents can be considered representative of America today, and to allow for a characterization of the redemptive self as a quintessentially American mode of identity.

However, McAdams acknowledges that there are limitations to how the redemptive self operates. These encompass both psychological and social issues. On the psychological level, McAdams admits that “the expectation that all bad things should be redeemed may keep a person from experiencing a life in its full emotional richness” (McAdams 2006c: 268). On the social level the same expectation can trivialize the suffering of others, while strong commitment to distinctive individual accomplishment runs the risk of separating the self from society.

Furthermore, not all contemporary Americans develop the redemptive self. The life stories of such people are described by McAdams as presenting “contaminated plots” and “vicious circles”. This reveals the rather heavily normative and judgemental aspect of McAdams’s model: the redemptive self is not only a dominant characteristic of contemporary Americans, it is also an ideal state; when redemption fails, it issues in not only deviation, but also a sense of failure.

McAdams’s model of the redemptive self reveals most clearly his allegiance to an essentialist, centred, singular and individualistic understanding of the subject. The narrative mobilized to articulate this type of identity is circumscribed by a particular type of story, with clearly defined plot, turning points and resolution. Discussing various narrative constructions of self, Peter

Raggat argues that the imposition of coherence on modern life constitutes “a hegemonic insult” (Raggat 2006). Such critique can be extended to the *redemptive self*. While McAdams (2006a) is prepared to acknowledge that “life is messier and more complex than the stories we tell about it”, there is no real provision to address and incorporate this complexity in his model.

Significantly, the dynamics of redemption as an essential aspect of contemporary American identity became evident for McAdams in the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, when, “The workers were convinced that the death and the destruction of 9/11 would give way to new life, new growth, new power, and a new reality that, in some fundamental sense, would prove better than what came before” (McAdams 2006c: 3). The inevitability of redemption was simply taken for granted. It is in the context of political debates post-September 11, 2001, that McAdams’s emphasis on redemption becomes understandable. The widespread critical response to the unspeakable horror of 9/11 insists that “the time has come to abandon the cynicism, ironic play and “oppositional anarchism” associated with postmodernism and to embrace a positive conception of power and its potential affinity with truth and knowledge” (Bennett 2009: 20). From this position the questioning and ideological critique by postmodernism of such categories as truth, beauty and goodness are interpreted as a temporary aberration and a reaction against a once progressive modernism, whose agenda now seems newly energized. McAdams’s model of the redemptive self can thus be characterized as a reworking of many features of the modernist project in the post-9/11 context, where the narrative of redemption is powerfully positioned as a new grand narrative.

McAdams argues consistently for the existence of a single, stable and knowable reality and, correspondingly, the existence of a self that is singular, stable and knowable. Moreover, this self is masterful and agentic; it strives to actualize its true core. In the context of the debates concerning the shift beyond postmodernity, the paramount expression of McAdams’s essentialist approach to self—the redemptive self—can be seen as a model of *post-postmodern* self superseding the plethora of postmodern selves such as the empty self, the protean self, the saturated self and the quantum self.

### **The Dialogical Self Theory: Towards Decentralization**

In comparison to McAdams’s model of identity as a life story, Hubert Hermans’s DST moves away from a modern discourse of the self as unitary, reflexive and transparent. According to Hermans, the model of dialogical self assumes a far-reaching decentralization of both self and society. Hermans’s DST weaves two concepts, self and dialogue, together in such a way that a more profound understanding of the interconnection of self and society is achieved. Hermans extends the narrative theorizing of subject and self by emphasizing the role of the Other. In doing so he draws on Bakhtin’s ideas regarding dialogism. Hermans further incorporates two main trends of twentieth-century literature into his model: (1) the spatialization of time, and (2) the retreat of the omniscient narrator. Like McAdams, Hermans utilizes James’s *I/Me* dichotomy (in which both follow Sarbin, who was the first to reconceptualise the *I* as the author of a self-narrative and the *Me* as an actor), but maps it within not Erikson’s eight-stage model of psychosocial development but rather Bakhtin’s model of the polyphonic novel. Hermans’s comparison of James’s and Bakhtin’s approaches is instructive here not only as a way of delineating Hermans’s own position but also for outlining the difference between his own and McAdams’s theory.

Hermans suggests that although James’s thinking on the self admitted the possibility of a multiplicity of characters, Bakhtin’s polyphonic novel, if applied to the self, can be seen as a challenge not only to the notion of individuality (the self as discrete from other selves), but also to the unity and continuity of the self. If the self is considered in terms of a polyphonic novel, the implication is a far-reaching decentralization of the self in terms of a decentralized plurality of characters (Hermans 2001b).

Whereas in McAdams's model a single author is assumed to tell a story about himself/herself as an actor, in Hermans's model there is a provision for "one and the same individual to live in a multiplicity of worlds with each world having its own author telling a story relatively independent of the authors of the other worlds" (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 46). Moreover, following principles of dialogism, Hermans maintains that at times several authors within the self may enter into dialogue with each other. As such, the self is accorded a capacity not only for dialogue but also for imaginative narrative.

Hermans contrasts his model to the rationalism and individualism of the Cartesian *cogito*. The Cartesian conception of the self, subsumed in the principle "I think", presupposes one centralized *I* responsible for reasoning. As a cornerstone of consciousness, "I think" is located in disembodied mental processes and is opposed to the body and material processes extended in space. In contrast to the Cartesian unitary self, Hermans's dialogical self is based on the assumption that there are many *I*-positions that can be occupied by the same person and furthermore that the dialogical self can be physically distributed among individuals and practices in the social world. In proposing his model of the dialogical self, Hermans contributes to the growing critique of the Cartesian Ego as a universal and individualistic phenomenon.

Hermans thus continues a questioning of the category of the subject initiated by two groups of philosophers: on the one hand the American pragmatists—John Dewey, Charles Pierce, William James and George Herbert Mead—and, on the other, twentieth-century French philosophers—Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard. As Hermans and Kempen note, both these broad movements "share a concern with the decentering of the person as a subject" (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 29). Hermans and Kempen draw further support for DST from the growing body of research on the "multifacetedness" and "possibilities" of self deriving from experimental psychology and psychotherapy. At the same time, he incorporates the insight of deconstructionism in literary criticism, in the light of which stories told by subjects and clients can be seen not as a fixed text, but as a text that is continuously interpreted and reinterpreted and thereby reordered in changing social contexts. Finally, Hermans emphasizes the relevance to the narrative conceptualization of the self of structural analysis of myth and folktales, such as offered by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp. In drawing on these various sources, Hermans and Kempen lay a foundation for a view of the subject that "takes decentralization seriously without neglecting the potentials of the individual as an agentic force" (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 39).

Crucially, though, it is Bakhtin's ideas on dialogue, multivoicedness and polyphony that allow Hermans to decentralize the self. Following Bakhtin, in Hermans's model there is no provision for an overarching *I* that organizes the constituents of *Me*. Instead, the polyphonic character of the organization leads to the supposition of a decentralized multiplicity of *I*-positions that function like relatively independent authors, constructing their narratives about their respective *Me*'s as actors. The DST thus addresses the coherence of the self within the context of the intrinsic separateness of different contrasting *I*-positions: "As such the self functions as a multiplicity of positions that are located at different places in an imagined and imaginative landscape. At the same time, however, the self is multivoiced, and the different voices may enter into dialogical relationships with one another. It is in the dialogical relation that the possibility of coherence is given" (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 58).

The coherence is to be achieved through a synthesizing activity of the self, which encompasses both centrifugal and centripetal forces. Commenting on their respective positions, McAdams notes with regards to Hermans's dialogical self:

Hermans rejects the simple consistency of a univocal self, but he suggests that a kind of self-coherence can nonetheless be realized in the multivocal dialogue itself. Different voices, or *I*-positions, assert their separateness and autonomy, Hermans maintains, but they may also be seen as working together by virtue of participating in the same self-defining conversation. (McAdams 2006a: 119)

Hermans's view is considerably different from McAdams's with regard to the unity and centredness of the self—the former is much more in favour of multiple and decentred understanding. Hermans is also not in accord with McAdams's understanding of narrative coherence as the criterion of "good story".

Incoherence is theorized by Hermans as a multiplicity of *I*-positions that can be articulated, explored, and brought into dialogical or polyvocal communication. Furthermore, the dialogical self incorporates collective voices that are conceived as being both inside and outside the self. In this way the dialogical self bridges the divide between individual and social, overthrowing the individualistic constriction of self "within the skin". Thus, Hermans maintains that "the dialogical self distances itself from any autonomy between self and society. As a multiplicity of voices, the self functions as a society and is, at the same time, part of a broader society" (Hermans 2001c: 59). For Hermans, this aspect of the dialogical conceptualization of the self holds particular promise in the postmodern context, where individuals have to deal with "a high density of voices, a large heterogeneity of voices, and rapid shifting among opposing, contradicting, and conflicting voices" (Hermans 2001c: 59). From this position Hermans urges a rethinking of the problem of the unity versus multiplicity of self, and positions his dialogical self as a solution to the following conundrum:

In my view, the basic issue for the future theorizing in the realm of self and identity is not the opposition between unity and fragmentation with unity seen as desirable and fragmentation as undesirable. Rather, the issue is the relation between unity and multiplicity. Dialogue has the potential to transform fragmentation into constructive multiplicity. (Hermans 2001c: 59)

In comparison to McAdams, Hermans moves away from a modernist discourse of the self as a coherent, centred, bounded entity. Hermans specifically addresses the issue of the relationship between his DST and modern versus postmodern views on self in his and Hermans-Konopka's *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society*, which integrates the DST with broader research on cultural, political and historical determinants of the self. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka outline three historical perspectives on the self: traditional, modern and postmodern. These represent not consecutive historical stages, but models that can overlap in their operation and provide templates for identity building, each characterized by its advantages and disadvantages.

The traditional model of self is encompassed by the view of the world "as one of totality, unity and purpose" (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 84). It further relies on the existence of a moral telos, social hierarchy, authority and dogmatic truth. The traditional model of self operates on the basis of a cyclical conception of time, in contrast with the linear temporality characteristic of the modern period. The traditional sense of self is more firmly embedded in the community and connected to the natural environment. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka suggest that the connection with the environment and with nature represents a valuable resource that can be borrowed from the traditional model of self and incorporated into contemporary identity.

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka then define the modern self as grounded in the quest for "undisputed certainties, science and conceptual analysis" (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 87) and "the pretension to universal truth" (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 114). While the traditional self is defined by its place in a meaningful cosmic order, the modern self places a premium on self definition and individuality. The modern self strives for personal autonomy and self-development. It establishes strict boundaries between self and non-self and its relationship to the natural environment changes from embeddedness to control. While the loss of this connection is regrettable, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka argue that the assumption that the individual represents an autonomous and independent being, whose actions and thoughts are not reduced to the working of the external agencies, is a valuable lesson of modernity.

In the postmodern self Hermans and Hermans-Konopka highlight an "emphasis on difference, otherness, local knowledge" and "a far reaching decentralization of the subject, whose stable sense of identity and biographical continuity give way to fragmentation" (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 114). The authors see as a valuable achievement of postmodernism the tendency

to acknowledge the impacts of history, language communities, social conventions, globalization, networks and technology as factors relevant to the construction of the self in a contemporary world. However, they emphasize that, while liberating the self from the confines of the encapsulated and centralized structure of the modern self, the postmodern self does not make provision for a solid basis for an engaged agency.

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka then develop an argument that the different phases in the historical development of self are not purely successive and mutually exclusive. Rather, they coexist and overlap, making certain positions prominent while overshadowing others. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka argue, “Positions that were prominent in a previous phase are not totally removed from the repertoire but, in so far as they are neglected, dominated, or suppressed, are backgrounded, with the possibility of becoming, under facilitating conditions, prominent in a later phase” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 104). They further argue that in a contemporary globalized society, “traditional, modern, and postmodern selves and identities are confronted with each other and show fits or misfits” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 116). The gap that can emerge between different models and reciprocal world views can lead to a “global misunderstanding”, and thus the dialogical self model is needed to negotiate between and integrate these various positions.

The dialogical self model is formed on the basis of the comparison of the three models of the self—traditional, modern and postmodern—that are incorporated as different positions within a society of mind. It acknowledges lessons from three historical models and takes into account both their positives and their negatives. The dialogical self thus relies on extensions of self both in time (historical positioning) and space (positioning within a globalized contemporary world). Hermans and Hermans-Konopka highlight that “[i]t would be a misunderstanding to conceive the self as an essence in itself and its extensions as “secondary” or “added” characteristics. In contrast, the dialogical self is formed and constituted by its extensions” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 6).

Hermans thus posits his dialogical self as a metatheoretical construct that introduces a broader principle (positioning and dialogism) according to which various models of self—traditional, model and postmodern—can be reconciled. White and Epston choose a different strategy. Putting into practice a highly critical epistemology, they question and challenge the core ontological and gnoseological assumptions of mainstream academic psychology, including the very concept of “self”.

## **Narrative Therapy: Between Subjectivation and Agency**

Michael White used to open his workshops with the following questions to the audience: “Has anyone experienced some family dynamic this morning?”; “Has anyone been working through resistance lately?”; “Has anyone been trying to actualize his/her inner self?”; “Has anyone been dealing with the effect of maladaptive basic beliefs?” The point of course was that, as human beings, we can construe our psychological life in a variety of ways—a position that White shares with constructivist and social constructionist perspectives. As Niemeyer highlights, “because the very terms in which we construe ourselves are cultural artefacts, our selves are deeply penetrated by the vocabularies of our place and time, expressing dominant modes of discourse as much as any unique personality” (Niemeyer 2000: 209). By comparison with McAdams’s framework for the analysis of personality and identity or Hermans’s take on the self, in White and Epston’s approach, personality organization is not specified. This stems not only from the fact that the latter authors have developed a therapeutic model: a predominant proportion of therapeutic approaches in psychology, from psychoanalysis to cognitive-behaviour, anchor their therapeutic ideas in a particular understanding of personality structure. For White and Epston it is rather a deliberately conceived position that refuses to define a human being and instead draws attention to the combinatory work of discourses, practices and techniques in which persons find themselves operating. Consequently, narrative therapy does not offer a personality *model*, and avoids using terms such as “self” and “personality”.

White and Epston's position corresponds to Gergen's critique of objectifying cultural practices: "For, in postmodern perspective, we find the culture in constant danger of objectifying its vocabularies of understanding, and thereby closing off options and potentials" (Gergen 1992: 26). Furthermore, their practice responds to Gergen's call for a critical, self-reflexive and vigilant professional position: "a form of professional investment in which the scholar attempts to de-objectify the existing realities, to demonstrate their social and historical embeddedness and to explore their implications for social life" (Gergen 1992: 26—27).

Such a view doesn't imply that the thorny issue of subjectivity or agency are of no interest to White and Epston. The issue of personal agency was at stake for them in adopting a narrative model from the very beginning:

The narrative mode locates a person as a protagonist or participant in his/her world. This is a world of interpretative acts, a world in which every retelling of a story is a new telling, a world in which persons participate with others in the "re-authoring", and thus in the shaping, of their lives and relationships. (White and Epston 1990: 82)

On the basis of narrative therapy's commitment to agency and self-directionality, some critics argue that White and Epston's understanding of the subject has affinity with the modernist paradigm. Along these lines Polkinghorne suggests that "narrative therapists were selective in what they drew from postmodern writers. Some of the postmodern ideas, such as the centrality of language and discourse, were adopted, whereas other themes, such as the rejection of the creative subject, were not adopted" (Polkinghorne 2004: 54). Polkinghorne argues that narrative therapy places at its core the notion of a creative, authorial, self-constructing subject. His verdict is that narrative therapy "primarily makes use of existential themes, such as self-agency, empowerment, and responsibility, in its therapeutic work while using postmodern themes for diagnostic purposes" (Polkinghorne 2004: 54).

But as Besley argues, White rejects the view that narrative therapy is "a recycled structural/humanist practice" guided by the "discourses of psychological emancipation" (Besley 2001: 78). In doing so, White highlights that while he appreciates the positive impulse of humanist tradition that motivated people to challenge domination, discrimination and oppression, he strongly opposes the essentialism underlying both humanist and structuralist conceptions of the self. In this, the influence of the Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigm on White and Epston was crucial, and thus merits closer inspection in this context.

Foucault's interest in self and subjectivity was governed by three critical questions: "How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise and submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?" (Foucault 1984: 49). The first two questions were addressed extensively in the works produced from 1969 to 1980 (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, *Madness and Civilisation*, *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality, Volume I*), while *Volume II* and *Volume III* of *History of Sexuality*, *The Uses of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, which appeared in 1984, indicated a change of focus, and were concerned mainly with the third question. The early version of narrative therapy presented in *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* drew on the early and middle years in Foucault's work, encompassed by the frameworks of archaeological and genealogical analyses. However, Foucault's work continued to exert a powerful influence on White later on, as he sought to integrate Foucault's ideas on ethical self-constitution into his theorizing.

Foucault's early archaeological, or epistemological, studies recognize the changing frameworks of production of knowledge through the history of such practices as science, philosophy, art and literature. In his later genealogical practice, he argues that institutional power, intrinsically linked with knowledge, *forms* individual human "subjects", and *subjects* them to disciplinary norms and standards. Foucault's earlier archaeological analysis was instrumental in paving the way for the particular view on subjectivity that he later formulated. The conceptual apparatuses of episteme, discursive formation and discursive practices create a basis of the archaeological method and are critical for the view on the subject that Foucault elaborates at this stage. According to Foucault, "epistemes or discursive formations represent systems of thought and knowledge that are

governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period" (Gutting 2011). These possibilities include the very notion of "man" itself, which is understood by Foucault as an epistemological concept. Foucault argues that this concept only appears during the Classical age, as previously "there was no epistemological consciousness of man as such" (Foucault 1970: 309).

Discursive formations and discursive practices are further implicated in the production of the subject through a mechanism of *enunciative function*. Besides the conceptual components, discursive formations also include institutions, disciplines, rules and practices, as well as material sites of production and the particular way they are organized. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault writes:

[W]hen one speaks of a system of formation, one does not only mean the juxtaposition, coexistence, or interaction of heterogeneous elements (institutions, techniques, social groups, perceptual organizations, relations between various discourses), but also the relation that is established between them — and in a well determined form — by discursive practice. (Foucault 2005: 80—81)

Foucault further describes discursive practice as "a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function" (Foucault 2005: 131). Enunciative function defines the place affecting any speaking subject that enters a particular discursive fellowship, and thus defines a subject as such. Consequently, in Foucault's analysis the factors that can be considered external to the definition of the subject become definitive and determining of its position, function and experience:

In the proposed analysis, instead of referring back to *the synthesis* or *the unifying function* of a subject, the various enunciative modalities manifest his dispersion. To the various statuses, the various sites, the various positions that he can occupy or be given when making a discourse. To the discontinuity of the planes from which he speaks. And if these planes are linked by a system of relations, this system is not established by the synthetic activity of a consciousness identical with itself, dumb and anterior to all speech, but by the specificity of a discursive practice. (Foucault 2005: 60)

For Foucault, discourse creates "a field of regularity for the various positions of subjectivity" (Foucault 2005: 60). What is crucial from the point of view of the present discussion is Foucault's sustained critique of the ontological precedence of the subject as a founding, unitary, self-evident category. Foucault subverts the essentialist understanding of the subject by connecting the problematics of the subject with the work of social, political and historical forces.

As Michael Guilfoyle notes, "White has sought to build a therapy that uses as theoretical platform Foucault's account of power/knowledge and his critique of humanistic, sovereign subject in particular" (Guilfoyle 2012: 626). Foucault's power/knowledge nexus lies at the core of White and Epston's contextual understanding of people's lives and of the narrative frameworks that people use to constitute their lives. Drawing on Foucault, White and Epston maintain that the "storying of experience" is dependent on language and that people therefore ascribe meaning to their experience and constitute their lives and relationships through language. In doing so, they mobilize the existing stock of culturally available discourses regulated by and associated with a particular norm and values, indicating what is appropriate and relevant to the expression and representation of particular aspects of experience. Thus, people's understanding of their lived experience takes the form of value-laden constructions, informed by and embedded within particular discursive practices, predicated on certain forms of unitary knowledge and techniques of power.

White and Epston observe that the people who consult them often share beliefs related to a sense of failure to achieve certain expectations, to replicate certain specifications, or to meet certain norms. These expectations, specifications and norms embody "normalizing judgments" in the modern discourse of power, which define successful personhood as "the encapsulated self" and

emphasize a form of autonomy and independence that is characterized by self-possession, self-containment, self-reliance, self-motivation and self-actualization. “The very concept”, notes White, “of “autonomous and independent action” and for that matter, of what it means to be a “real” or “authentic” person—is founded upon these constructed norms, and an inability to reproduce these norms categorizes people as “personal failures in their own and each other’s eyes” (White 2007: 268). As Guilfoyle notes, in narrative therapy there is no assumption of essential, given, internally coherent, sovereign self waiting to be released, and “therapy cannot be oriented around the quest for such an essential figure” (Guilfoyle 2012: 628).

Yet, in *Maps of Narrative Practice* White re-articulates his view on personal agency as associated with “intentional state understanding of identity, whereby people are seen as living out their lives in line with their intentions and values” (White 2007: 103). This raises an important question of how Foucault’s ideas of the discursively constituted subject can be sustained alongside White’s commitment to a subject imbued with the power of agency.

The tension between White’s view on agency and his commitment to a view of the subject as discursively produced in some ways stems from the tension in Foucault’s own theorization of the subject. Many critics have drawn attention to the controversies in Foucault’s position regarding power and the possibility of resistance as they present themselves within a particular context of power/knowledge constellation. Some claim that while Foucault generally objects to domination, his position on this issue is considerably weakened, if not discredited altogether, by his own insistence that any resistance to power is an offshoot of power itself and can therefore only lead to a reproduction of power in a new guise. The critique often centres on the absence of an “outside” in Foucault’s paradigm, which also, according to some authors, leaves the question of truth within Foucault’s model in principle unanswerable (Colebrook 1997). Other critics suggest that it is not necessary (and, in practical terms, probably impossible) to be “outside” the episteme determining a specific epistemic condition in order to effect changes or resistance. They argue that the method of resistance proposed by Foucault is, rather, to try to strengthen some epistemic alignments and to challenge, undermine or evade others (Rouse 2005).

It should be emphasized, however, that Foucault is one of the few theorists of power who recognize that power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive force that compels individuals to do things against their wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society. A key point about Foucault’s approach to power is that it transcends politics and sees power as an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon. In this context, to challenge power is not a matter of seeking some “absolute truth” (which is in any case a socially produced power), but “of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (Foucault 1991: 75). Discourse can be a site of both power and resistance:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it. [...] We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. (Foucault 1998: 100—101)

As Judith Butler notes: “What he is saying to us is that in the practice of critical thought we are forming ourselves as subjects, through resistance and questioning. Foucault does not presuppose a pre-existing subject that can say “no” and criticize authority. Rather that the subject forms him or herself through the practice of criticism” (Butler 2008). It is precisely in this way—paying simultaneous attention to the repressive effects of power and the possibilities of resistance through critical questioning that discourses create—that Foucault’s work on power was appropriated by White and Epston.

This has consequences for the overall understanding of the subject in their work, and specifically, of its alignment with modern versus poststructural and postmodern positions. The adoption of a poststructuralist understanding of language and postmodern view on discourse by White and

Epston has also significantly reconfigured their understanding of subject which, as my previous analysis shows, is different from the essentialist, given, stable, fixed and autonomous subject of the modernist paradigm. For them selfhood is both narratively constructed and active: its actual presence is enacted through life actions and decisions. However, for White and Epston the agency and self-directionality of the subject represent not a given resource, but rather a challenge for narrative therapy. From this perspective narrative therapy can be thought of as one of the techniques of selfhood, and the self-descriptive narratives that emerge in this process—as practices of identity.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the narrative organization of the subject. It critically analysed how self, subjectivity and agency are conceptualized in McAdams's, Hermans's, and White and Epston's approaches to narrative psychology. It paid particularly close attention to how these models are positioned with regards to the debates concerning modern versus postmodern conceptualizations of the subject.

McAdams consistently rejects postmodern critique and responds to the debates by reiterating his commitment to modernist values and assumptions. He posits the subject as the centred, transparent, reflective and self-directing individual. His view is in accord with the modernist perspective in psychology which, as Nikolas Rose notes, approaches the self as “coherent, bounded, individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action, and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography” (Rose 1998: 3). Epistemologically, McAdams's view is in line with a modernist objectivist orientation that Neimeyer defines as grounded in the understanding of reality and self as singular, stable, and, in principle, knowable (Neimeyer 2000: 208).

The DST developed by Hermans differs substantially from McAdams's model of identity as a life story, engaging with postmodern critique on a number of levels. The model of dialogical self defined as polyvocal, embodied, socially distributed and open takes a substantial step towards a conception of the self as inherently social, multiplistic, decentred, contingent and evolving.

On a metatheoretical level, Hermans's DST attempts to reconcile traditional, modern and postmodern understandings of self. Hermans argues that these perspectives can be placed alongside each other, each being an instrument both of exploring and of producing identity and subjectivity, providing a repertoire of identity strategies. His position corresponds to that of Elliott, who suggests:

[W]e should not see contemporary identity strategies as simple alternatives: the postmodern as something that eclipses the modern. Modern and postmodern forms of self are better seen as simultaneous ways of living in contemporary culture. Constructing a self today is about managing some blending of these different ways of living; a kind of constant intermixing and dislocation, of modern and postmodern states of mind. (Elliott 2005: 150)

At the opposite end of the spectrum, White and Epston's narrative therapy embraces the postmodern “repudiation of traditional ontological assumptions (bearing on the nature of “reality”) and epistemological frameworks (bearing on the nature of knowledge)” (Neimeyer and Raskin 2000: 5). However, White and Epston's approach to the subject is not nihilistic. While it is critical of modern assumptions about a bounded, unitary, given subject, it strives to address the issue of agency.

Such a position corresponds to what Holstein and Gubrium describe as an “affirmative” reaction to the postmodern critique of the subject. These authors delineate two ways in which postmodernists respond to the question of the continued existence of the self in the context of the “crisis of confidence” ushered in by postmodernism. While sceptical or radical postmodernists dismantle self as the central agent of experience, affirmative postmodernists strive to transform the crisis of confidence by “reconceptualising the self as a form of working subjectivity” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 57). From this perspective the self becomes a “practical project of everyday

life” that is situated and plural, “locally articulated, locally recognized and locally accountable” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 70). Within this context, the self “no longer references an experiential constant entity, a central perspective or presence, but rather stands as a practical discursive accomplishment” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 70). White and Epston’s narrative therapy puts in practice precisely such an affirmative approach to the subject, informed by postmodern critique.

The issue of narrative organization is however closely bound up with the issue of the subject’s stability, both from a narrative point of view and the point of view of the specifically psychological realm of experience. In Chap. 4 I move on to consideration of the important issue of the continuity and change of the narrative subject.

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### 3. NARRATIVE SUBJECT. BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION

#### Stability and Change: Psychological and Narratological Perspectives

This chapter addresses the issue of stability and change of personality, self and identity through the prism of narrative theorization. The chapter begins by sketching the context of discussion of the issues of personality stability and change in academic psychology. It then outlines a range of positions in literary studies on the issue of narrative continuity. Narrative, change and self are thus positioned as connected by a matrix of functional links that create a range of possibilities in thinking through the issue of change. The chapter then demonstrates how some of these possibilities are realized in McAdams's model of identity as a life story, Hermans's dialogical self theory, and White and Epston's narrative therapy.

The issues of stability and change, while being central concepts for psychology, have proven to be among the hardest to explore. In academic psychology the answer to the question “Can personality change?” depends on how personality is conceptualized, how change is defined and measured, and in which context—from childhood and adult development to therapy—the change is addressed (Heatherton and Weinberger 1994). From the position of the nomothetic approach to the study of personality, epitomized by the discourse of traits, there is little ground to talk about change or the malleability of personality. An avalanche of nomothetic research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s strongly supported the conclusion that personality is indeed “set like plaster”, as Costa and McCrae suggested in their article of the same title—that individual differences in traits show substantial longitudinal consistency, especially in adult years (Costa and McCrae 1989, 1994).

On the other hand, developmental psychology recognizes changes in motivations, current concerns, thought content and defence mechanisms. The most dramatic re-configurations of psychological organization were initially outlined by Freud (1933) in his model of psychosexual development from birth to adolescence. The model elaborated later by Erik Erikson (1963, 1982) from the position of ego-psychology extended the understanding of stages to cover lifespan development. Erikson postulated an eight-stage progression in psychosocial development, characterized by a shift from self-orientation to other-orientation. Each stage is defined through a crucial issue to be resolved and the nature of the outcome achieved through such resolution. Four stages are identified in the development from childhood to adolescence, progressively dealing with the issues of (1) *trust versus mistrust*; (2) *autonomy versus shame*; (3) *initiative versus guilt*; and (4) *industry versus inferiority*. The other four stages cover the development from young adulthood to old age. They are centred on issues of (5) *identity versus role confusion* (where successful outcome is an achievement of fidelity); (6) *intimacy versus isolation* (with the successful outcome of love); (7) *generativity versus self-absorption* (with the positive outcome of care); and (8) *ego integrity versus despair* (with the positive outcome of wisdom). Overall, the changes outlined within various models of developmental psychology are conceptualized as stage-related and gradual. By and large, these changes are understood to lead in the direction of greater maturity (Bengston et al. 1985; Vaillant 1977).

However, the circumstances in which human life unfolds in the real world cannot be restricted to the “generally expected environment” postulated by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V* as a background against which psychological functioning is measured and judged. A relatively new trend in psychology has sought to correct this deficiency by looking at non-normative events and changes, such as sudden and unpredictable life transition, illness and loss, trauma and stress (Schaefer and Moos 1992; Stewart 1982; Taylor 1983; Tedeschi and Calhoun 1995). This context is often regarded as being most strongly associated with personality change in adulthood. Importantly, this line of research addresses not only the *non-normative* but also the *subjective* character of such transitional processes (Gibson and Brown 1992). This line

of inquiry culminates in the exploration of the abrupt and total transformations of personality that Miller and C'de Baca (1994) aptly call *quantum changes*.

Similarly, counselling and psychotherapy not only assume the possibility of change in personality, but actively strive to bring such change about. The almost opposite view that practical psychology takes with regard to the issue of stability and change is just one of the aspects that reflects the great divide separating academic psychology, which addresses theoretical issues and experimental research within the confines of the laboratory, and practical psychology, which attends to living, breathing individuals. Using different notions to conceptualize and facilitate change depending on a particular framework—such as classical psychoanalysis, ego-psychology, cognitive-behavioural intervention, family therapy or humanistic psychology—the process of change is positioned not only as an overriding goal of the therapeutic process but also as its very core (Rogers and Dymond 1954). In classical psychoanalysis, while the progression of ever-deepening interpretations within the broader framework of a transference relationship between the client and the therapist represents the general mechanism of psychoanalytic intervention, ideally, an act of interpretation recognized by the client as accurate and associated with a sense of insight and new understanding is at the core of transformation and ego-growth. The vocabulary developed by different therapeutic schools to capture the character of change they are dealing with is indicative: from the psychoanalytic notion of “insight” and the “aha-experiences” of the Würzburg school, to the concepts of “reframing” used within family therapy and “encounter” postulated by humanistic psychology, each strives to put a finger on the important phenomenological dimension of transformation.

Finally, as discussed in the previous chapter, postmodern models of personality, such as Lifton's “protean self”, assume that self is in a constant state of flux, and that change as such is personality's most definitive characteristic. Overall, the diversity of positions on the issues of stability and change in psychology attests to the underlying tension between theoretical perspectives and approaches as they move from modernist towards postmodern assumptions.

Similar tensions can be detected with regard to the issue of stability and change in narratology, where some of the multiple connotations of narrative align it more readily with stability than with change. This is precisely the view taken by Jerome Bruner in his key contribution to the discussion of stability and change of narrative organization of personality in his monograph *Acts of Meaning*. One of the central threads running through the book is the idea that narrative helps to achieve synthesis, coherence and integrity, and serves as an instrument of social negotiation working against and through conflicts and deviations. This argument is embedded within the larger framework that Bruner proposes for understanding folk psychology as an instrument of culture, where the viability of the latter “inheres in its capacity for resolving conflicts, for explicating differences and renegotiating communal meanings” (Bruner 1990: 47). To ensure this, he suggests, “while a culture must contain a set of norms, it must also contain a set of interpretative procedures for rendering departures from those norms meaningful in terms of established patterns of beliefs. It is narrative and narrative interpretation upon which folk psychology depends for achieving this kind of meaning” (Bruner 1990: 47). While from an evolutionary point of view Bruner is inclined to link the very emergence of language with the necessity for social negotiation and resolution of conflicts, he argues strongly that, in everyday life, stories arise in response to some kind of deviation and strive to render this deviation comprehensible. As Bruner writes, “The function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern” (Bruner 1990: 49—50). It is of primary importance for this discussion that at the centre of such conflict or deviation Bruner positions human motivation and intentionality:

It begins to be clear why narrative is such a natural vehicle for folk psychology. It deals [...] with the stuff of human action and human intentionality. It mediates between the canonical world of culture and the more idiosyncratic world of beliefs, desires, and hopes. It renders the exceptional comprehensible and keeps the uncanny at bay — save as the uncanny is needed as a trope. It reiterates the norms of the society without being didactic. And [...] it provides a basis for rhetoric without confrontation. It can even teach, conserve memory, or alter the past. (Bruner 1990: 52)

In his earlier book *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner had addressed the issue of interaction between narrative and human intentionality from a structural rather than functional point of view, but similarly emphasized the canonical nature of narrative. In doing so he supported the view formulated earlier by scholars of orientations ranging from Russian formalism to cultural anthropology. In their various formulations, Bruner discerned and stressed a common argument that plot, or rather its particular stable and repetitive structural configuration, becomes a means of ensuring and achieving the return to the normal, original, or unproblematic state:

Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions. And since there are myriad intentions and endless ways for them to run into trouble — or so it would seem — there should be endless kinds of stories. But, surprisingly, this seems not to be the case. One view has it that lifelike narratives start with a canonical or “legitimate” steady state, which is breached, resulting in a crisis, which is terminated by a redress, with recurrence of the cycle an open possibility. (Bruner 1986b: 16)

Bruner further builds such accounts into the development of his larger argument about the mitigating function of narrative. In doing so he relies heavily on formalist and semiotic explorations of narrative and among them privileges Vladimir Propp’s contribution.

In his seminal monograph *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp outlines a formal model of a Russian fairytale. The model consists of thirty-one functions that follow each other in a particular order and that generally conform to the following sequence: reparation, complication, transference, struggle, return, recognition.<sup>1</sup> Propp’s morphology proposes not only that within a large body of texts a common structural organization can be discerned, but that its very dynamics serve to mitigate against deviation, ensuring a return to the status quo. The various functions identified in *Morphology of the Folktale* establish mutually neutralizing pairs that indicate the overriding homeostatic orientation of Propp’s model.

While Propp’s analysis can be used alongside Bruner’s to support the claim that the functions of narrative are primarily the negotiation and resolution of conflict, it runs the risk of ignoring the “semiotic constraints on narrativity” that Paul Ricœur (1984—1988) explicates in *Time and Narrative*. Ricœur argues that Propp’s model is deeply marked by an internal tension: the tale is conceptualized by Propp as both a series and a sequence, and there is a latent conflict between a more teleological concept of the order of the functions and a more mechanical concept of their interconnection. For Ricœur, this tension indicates the indirect reference to the plot as an embodiment of temporality. Ricœur argues that it is precisely this aspect that will divide Propp’s successors, some of whom will try to preserve a chronological element in their models, while others, following the critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss, will seek to reduce the chronological aspect of narrative to an underlying combinatory system.

This linear sequential structural analysis as which we might characterize Propp’s method can be described as “syntagmatic” structural analysis, while Lévi-Strauss champions “paradigmatic” structural analysis. The latter seeks to describe the pattern usually based on an a priori binary dichotomy that allegedly underlies the folkloristic text. This pattern does not coincide with sequential structure: in order to see it, the elements are taken out of the “given” order and are regrouped in one or more analytic schema. Lévi-Strauss contends that linear sequential structure represents apparent or manifest content, whereas the paradigmatic or schematic structure reveals the more important latent content. This assumption underpins various two-level models of narrative advanced in structuralist-semiotic literary studies of narrative, such as those that see it as comprising “deep structure” and “surface manifestation”, content plane and expression plane, *histoire* and *reçit*, *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, signifier and signified, or story and discourse.

The “classical” stage of such structuralist-semiotic approaches to narrative in Anglo-American literary criticism took place in the 1970s, and was exemplified by the work of such researchers as Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman, Wallace Martin and others. This stage was concerned with macrostructures (global textual organization) and deep (semantic) structures, and privileged the study of narrative in general over the interpretation of individual texts.

It is instructive for narrative psychology, then, to acknowledge the important reconsideration of the notion of narrative structure undertaken by the generation of post-narrativists such as Gerald Prince, Peter Brooks, Barbara Herrnstein Smith and Judith Roof who, while critiquing the classical narrativist paradigm from a variety of positions—psychoanalytic, feminist, and reader-response theory—shifted the emphasis from structure to processes and re-thought a number of dualistic concepts that had been taken for granted in previous models of narrative.

Following Jonathan Culler, Peter Brooks (1992) calls into question our “normal claim” that *fabula* precedes *sjuzhet*, which represents a reworking of a given *fabula*. Brooks problematizes the relationship between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, introducing the possibility that *fabula* is produced by the requirements of *sjuzhet*. In other words, there is an inherent contradiction in narrative, the contradiction between the logic of story and the logic of plot. For Brooks, this irreconcilability of two logics, rather than being aporetic, “points to the peculiar work of understanding that narrative is called to perform, and to the paralogical status of its solutions”. He elaborates on this in the following way:

[P]rior events, causes, are so only retrospectively, in a reading back from the end. In this sense, the metaphoric work of eventual totalization determines the meaning and status of the metonymic work of sequence — though it must also be claimed that the metonymies of the middle produced, gave birth to the final metaphor. The contradiction may be in the very nature of narrative, which not only uses but *is* a double logic. (Brooks 1992: 28)

For Brooks, the nature of narrative as a contradictory, double logic reveals why we have and need narrative, and how the need to plot meanings is itself productive of narrative.

While Brooks retains the notions of plot and story within his double-logic model, albeit in a much weakened form, Barbara Herrnstein Smith goes further towards deconstructing the dichotomy within narrative organization, whether its members are defined as plot and story or in some other way. She mounts a striking criticism against the very idea of story, which for her “bears an unmistakable resemblance to a Platonic ideal form: disembodied and unexpressed, unpictured, unwritten and untold” (Smith 1980: 211). Herrnstein Smith is wary of the fact that this idea “occupies a highly privileged ontological realm of pure being within which it unfolds immutable and eternally” (Smith 1980: 211).

Smith’s critique highlights the irreducible singularity of the narrative act, which always depends on the teller and occasion, and therefore human purposes, perceptions, actions and interactions. In the context of such critique, the issue of any original story that exists prior to its narrative rendering—particularly in the area of psychological functioning—almost loses sense. Narrative acts or narrativity acquire constitutive influence with regard to the experience at least as far as its meaning for an individual is concerned.

Developing the narrative metaphor further, Judith Roof argues that the logic of narrative cannot be stated but can only be narrated, advancing the argument that, if this is the case, “there is no subject, no “self” to narrate, that self, like narration cannot exist except through narrative” (Roof 1996: xv). Thus the narrative conceptualization of self, personality and subjectivity requires by necessity the introduction of a narrative method to be adequately studied. The border between ontological and epistemological grounds is thus blurred, and the two logics enter into mutually constitutive relationships:

Narrative constantly reproduces the phantom of a whole, articulated system, where even the concept of a system is a product of narrative, where the idea that there are such things as parts and wholes is already an effect of a narrative organizing. As a pervasive sense of the necessary shape of events and their perception and as the process by which characters, causes, and effects combine into patterns recognized as sensical, narrative is the informing logic by which individuality, identity, and ideology merge into a cooperative and apparently unified vision of the truths of existence. (Roof 1996: xiii)

These changing theoretical frameworks in literary scholarship to a degree reflect changes in historical modes of narration. These modes are most commonly divided into four literary-

historical and aesthetic paradigms—the classical, realist, modernist and postmodern. The important parameters of narrative seem to change historically. For example, in Greek tragedy, the action is the most important structural element. In the literary canon from the Renaissance onwards, character and the transmission of emotions become increasingly important. In modernist and postmodern fiction narrative structures increasingly gravitate towards elliptical, forking, circular patterns. These narratives are further characterized by a loosening of the chain of cause and effect in the plot, permanent gaps in narrative motivation and chronology, radical manipulation of temporal order, lack of closure and resolution, and increased ambiguity regarding the interpretation of story (Bordwell 1997).

These changes in narrative are theorized through such conceptual apparatuses as the distinction between open and closed text, notions of “obtuse” meaning or “third” sense, and categories of play, excess and event developed by poststructuralist and postmodern thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Stephen Heath, Umberto Eco and Jacques Derrida. Poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives therefore consider text to be a much more fluid phenomenon both in terms of its organization and in terms of its interpretation. Such a view culminates in a recent valorization of the category of *event*, which, having been re-thought by continental philosophers in the second half of the twentieth century, now implies not only change of state but also “the explosion of the New” (Žižek 2006: 167).

Like psychological scholarship, literary studies and narratology thus exhibit a variety of positions on the issue of stability and change. These differences depend on the historical stage in the development of narratology and literary scholarship—the move from structuralist and formalist models towards poststructural and postmodern theoretical frameworks of analysis, as well as the historical mode of narration from which texts for analysis are drawn, such as classical, realist, modernist or postmodern modes. When narrative psychology brings these two discourses—psychological and narratological—together in theorizing change, it has to articulate its position within the range of conceptual possibilities informed by the two disciplines. In the following section of this chapter I critically interrogate how the notions of narrative, change and selfhood are addressed in McAdams’s model, Hermans’s dialogical self theory, and White and Epston’s narrative therapy.

### **McAdams’s Life Stories and “The Making of the Self”**

In his theoretical and research work McAdams explores extensively how identity as a life story develops from childhood through to the adolescent years and considers the issue of stability versus change in adulthood. Initially, McAdams proposed the following progression: by the age of two, most children have developed a primitive autobiographical self. They know that their lived experiences—the things they do and feel—belong to them, that they are part of their lives evolving over time. By the age of three or four they develop an ability to form and retain episodic memories. By kindergarten age, most children have become pretty good storytellers—they have developed cognitive capacities to recognize, understand and tell a story, and in addition they have been introduced to storytelling technique by adults who surround them and they have been able to practise storytelling themselves through play with their peers.

The emergence of fully elaborated narrative identity takes place from teenage years to early adulthood. Both developmental factors and social demands are implicated here, and McAdams’s observation is both instructive and delimiting:

There is no cultural or social need to put your life together into a narrative identity before you reach emerging adulthood. [...] Questions about the meaning and purpose of life are too abstract to be appreciated and fully understood. Constructing a meaningful narrative identity involves weighing different hypothetical possibilities in life, choosing and mixing among alternative abstractions in a way that requires the full powers of abstract thought. The ability to weigh and balance hypotheticals — what some psychologists call *formal operational thinking* — is not usually seen before the teenage years. (McAdams 2006: 84)

In adult years, the issue of stability versus change is addressed within McAdams's three-levels model of personality, which encompasses the level of dispositional traits, the level of personal concerns and the level of life narrative. Within this model, the two higher levels are more likely to demonstrate change. While accepting evidence for traits stability (Level I), McAdams did not consider such stability as a factor responsible for stability on other levels, such as the level of personal concerns (Level II) and life narratives (Level III), since there is no assumption of a deterministic relationship between levels. McAdams suggested that although data is sparse, there are indications of considerable personality changes on Level II (personal concerns) over a lifespan. Indeed, units such as personal strivings, current concerns, and developmentally linked preoccupations are very likely to change greatly in accordance with changing developmental demands and particular life circumstances. As an example, McAdams referred to the changes in the salience of the concern of generativity, which has been found to increase for older adults. He proposed that changes were not only possible, but inevitable, on Level III (life narrative). Such changes can be characterized as a psychological writing and rewriting of an individual's *personal story*, which functions as an individual's identity. Identity stability involves longitudinal consistency in a life story. Identity transformation—identity crisis, identity change— involves story revision. Such story revisions may range from minor *editing* of an obscure chapter to a complete *rewriting* of the text, embodying an altered *plot*, a different *cast of characters*, a transformed *setting*, new *scenes* and new *themes* (McAdams 1985: 18).

McAdams then further refined various features of his life story model and assigned a different degree of stability to them: "From the most stable (and most cognitively primitive) to the most changing (and most cognitively complex), a list might contain (a) tone, (b) image, (c) theme, (d) setting, (e) scene, (f) character, and (g) ending" (McAdams 1994: 307). The narrative tone of an identity is the emotional feel of the story, while the unique imagery of a story consists of the characteristic sights and sounds of the narrative, emotionally charged pictures, symbols, metaphors and the like, some of which may be traced back to early fantasy play. The themes are recurrent patterns of motivational content in stories, which McAdams narrows down to two superordinate motives: agency (power/achievement/autonomy) and communion (love/intimacy/belonging). The ideological setting of the story is the backdrop of beliefs and values that provide an ontological, epistemological and moral framework for the narrative against which nuclear episodes, representing symbolic high points, low points and turning points, stand out "in bold print". The main protagonists in people's life stories are personified projections of the self, such as "the good father" or the "loyal friend", which McAdams calls "personal imagoes". Finally, McAdams argues, all life stories require a satisfying ending, through which the self is able to leave a legacy that generates new beginnings.

McAdams believes that changes are most characteristic of the core aspect of personality—identity as a life story—although this level presents the greatest challenges for researchers, as "here data are virtually nonexistent". He suggests, however, that it might be worthwhile to make some educated guesses about this process, which he summarizes as follows: "the model of change in identity over time is a process of continual fashioning and refashioning narrative in the direction of good form" (McAdams 1994: 307).

In line with his move towards broader integrative models of self, identity and culture, McAdams (2015) recently re-conceptualized the development of narrative identity by introducing a tripartite model of the psychological self as actor, agent and author. This model construes the psychological self as a reflexive arrangement of the subjective *I* and the constructed *Me*, evolving and expanding over the human life course. This trajectory is underpinned by the question "What might the *I* see and know when it reflexively encounters the *Me*?" McAdams contends that human selves come to know themselves from three different psychological perspectives: first as social actors who perform on a social stage, then as motivated agents who set forth an agenda for the future, and finally as autobiographical authors engaged in producing meaning-making self-reflexive narratives. Each of the three corresponds thus "to three developmental layers of psychological selfhood, emerging at different points in ontogeny and following their own respective developmental trajectories over the human life course" (McAdams 2013: 273).

McAdams contends that the self first enters the stage as a social actor, aiming to regulate itself in order to perform in the here and now, shortly before or around the second birthday. The knowledge that the *I* acquires about the *Me* at this stage encompasses semantic representation of traits, social roles and other features of the self implicated in social performances. As the person moves into middle childhood individual agency begins to be magnified and refined. The self as motivated agent focuses on goals and other anticipated end states and works towards their accomplishments. Gradually the *I* starts to perceive the *Me* as forward looking and future orientated, characterized by motives, values, hopes and fears. In late adolescence and adulthood, an autobiographical author emerges as the *I* now aims to create a story about the *Me*, that would make meaning of the reconstructed past, experienced present and anticipated future:

[T]he autobiographical author works to formulate a meaningful narrative for life, integrating the reconstructed episodic past, and the imagined episodic future in such a way as to explain, for the self and for others, why the actor does what it does, why the agent wants what it wants, and who the self was, is, and will be as a developing person in time. (McAdams 2013: 273)

The emergence of the autobiographical author relies on the developing skills of autobiographical reasoning, as outlined by Habermas and Bluck (2000)—a wide set of semantic operations that people use to interpret autobiographical memories and connect them with their present and their future. These skills begin to emerge in late childhood and continue to grow through the adolescent years. McAdams reviews evidence regarding research on autobiographical reasoning and concludes that young adults possess skills of mature self-authorship evident in (a) deriving organizing themes in their life stories; (b) sequencing memories of the events into causal chains in order to explain their development; (c) articulating the theme of personal growth over time; (d) formulating clear beginnings and endings in their life narrative accounts; and (e) incorporating foreshadowing and reflection on the past.

McAdams conceives his new tripartite model as a broad conceptual scheme “that reorganizes many different strands of research and theory of the psychological self under the three rubrics of the self as actor, agent, and author” (McAdams 2013: 289). It makes possible the addressing of some key issues in the area of human selfhood, including three perennial problems: self-regulation, self-esteem and self-continuity. McAdams suggests that there is a developmental logic for these three problems of selfhood that can be productively mapped onto the development of the self as actor, agent and author. McAdams notes that the problem of self-regulation emerges as the first and most pressing problem for the self during early childhood years, corresponding to the emergence of the self as social actor, although it continues to be relevant for authorship and agency as well. The issue of self-esteem becomes salient in middle childhood; it corresponds to the emergence of the self as motivated agent and is deeply linked to the *I*’s appraisal of its performance with respect to important goals, projects and motives. Self-continuity becomes the central problem in late adolescence and young adulthood and is tackled by the autobiographical author who on an ongoing basis must address the question: “how did the self of yesterday become the self of today, and how will that lead to the anticipated self of tomorrow?” (McAdams 2013: 274). As McAdams notes, as the three main issues of selfhood—self-regulation, self-esteem and self-continuity—are closely intertwined and interdependent, so is the work of self as actor, agent and author. Self-authorship continues through the course of adult life, while the *I* continues to understand the *Me* in terms of its traits and roles as a social actor, and the goals, plans and values of the motivated agent. However, McAdams insists that the efforts of all three components of selfhood are determined by one overarching agenda: “Put simply, the *I* seeks to enhance the *Me*—to make it bigger, stronger, and more excellent. The *I* also seeks to make the *Me* consistent, understandable, and predictable” (McAdams 2013: 290). Within the complex interplay of actor, agent and author the perspective of the latter seems to McAdams to be “especially germane for the *I*’s efforts to enhance the *Me* and to construct a *Me* that seems consistent and verifiable” (McAdams 2013: 291). Thus, just as coherence represents the central vector and value in McAdams’s understanding of the narrative subject, continuity represents the central vector of the development of narrative identity.

McAdams's model of identity as life story can be critiqued in terms of its dealing with the issue of stability and change from various positions: philosophical, literary studies and psychological research. First and foremost, the exploration of how narrative is connected to psychological stability and change has to acknowledge the powerful connection between narrative and temporality. Paul Ricœur, one of the most influential scholars to tackle this issue, argues that narrative serves as a means of arranging human experience in time. Yet, he also suggests that the histories that human beings construct do not represent the “objective” records of events occurring across time; rather they utilize the same principles as literature does, serving as creative means of exploring and describing realities. In constructing such histories, human agents follow narrative principles of “employment”: they strive to generate intelligibility by organizing past, present and future into a meaningful pattern. For Ricœur, time and narrativity principles are also closely intertwined in the construction of individual, autobiographical stories. Ricœur's work highlights how assumptions about time may condition narrative forms, how multiple temporalities can be at play in a single text and how the process of reading inflects textual practices. This complexity of temporal dimensions in autobiographical construction is bracketed in McAdams's theorizing and divorced from his exploration of change, which arguably leads to the following limitations.

The notion of change in McAdams's model is linked with developmental progression through stages. McAdams makes this link explicit by mapping James's model of “I” as an author and “Me” as actors onto the Eriksonian model of adult development. In this model, eight stages follow each other in a particular order; none of them can be skipped and no others can be added. While a temporal dimension is present in both Erikson's and McAdams's models, it is a particular temporality that can best be described as a chronology, similar to chronology in Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, where functions are supposed to follow each other in a particular order. Other researchers working within the life story paradigm similarly embrace the perspective outlined by the formalists and perfected by structuralist literary scholars. For example, Gary S. Gregg argues that, “identity is organized simultaneously as (a) a deep structure underlying a set of homologous binary oppositions, as proposed by Lévi-Strauss in his studies of myth and (b) articulated in a formulaic plot-episode structure, as defined by Propp, Lord, and Raglan in their studies of folktale and oral epics” (Gregg 2007: 64). Such understanding of identity has profound implications for the temporal dimension. In his analysis of Propp's model, Ricœur demonstrates that while the axis of time is present in this model, it is a particular temporality—as Ricœur defines it, achronic—divorced from the real contingency and incalculability of time. Consequently, McAdams's model relies on the understanding of time as achronic and in principle closed.

Such understating of time is also evident in the way McAdams's model deals with the issue of resolution or ending in adapting the notion of a story as a metaphor for human life. Whether in terms of the achievement of Eriksonian stage eight or a redemptive state of self, McAdams's model seems to presuppose an “in-built” finalization of life and is governed by strong teleological logic. But, as Roland Barthes poignantly notes, autobiographies cannot be completed: “What I write about myself is never the last word. [...] What right does my present have to speak of my past? Has my present some advantage over my past? What “grace” might have enlightened me?” (Barthes 1997: 120—121). Narrowing the definition of a story and structuring it as incorporating distinct consecutive stages encompassed by a particular teleology has the result of locating narrative not in the realm of open-ended time and potentiality but in the realm of finalized and circumscribed actuality.

The redemptive self model that McAdams posits as normative for generative American adults demonstrates the dangers of such simplistic treatment of the issue of transformation and time. Within this model the self can almost be said to know only two options: either to become a redemptive self or to fail, and both outcomes are outlined from the beginning. As such, the redemptive self starts to lose processual quality in favour of static, product-like features. Moreover, the achievement of a redemptive self closely resembles a utopian project in the sense that it promises the resolution of all issues, guarantees a positive outcome to any misfortune, and is simultaneously located in the future and in the present; one aspires to redemption, but also lives

a redemptive self on a day to day basis. As Frederic Jameson (2005) reminds us, utopia brings with it closure in space and time. It can be argued that as a utopian model the redemptive self represents a finally determined model in which there is no room for real human choice and decision; the rules of such decision-making are outlined from the beginning, as an algorithm of redemption. Furthermore, any ambivalence and contradictions are forced out of the self. When all the contradictions are evacuated, the self is reduced to the overarching dynamics of redemption. Thus, “generative” identity becomes, paradoxically, deprived of its generative potential. As with any utopian model, it suffers from stagnation and closure, from the impossibility of development. As Morson notes with regard to the most profound feature of utopian theorizing, it depicts the world of perfect product, and in “the world of the perfect product, real process — process that entails eventness and uncertainty — is obsolete” (Morson 1994: 13).

McAdams's privileging of schematic developmental sequences—such as the redemptive self—over the contingent, specific and situational is open to criticism from the perspective of psychological research as well. McLean, Pasupathi and Pals note that within McAdams's model of narrative identity “the specific processes by which the life story develops remain underexamined” (McLean et al. 2007: 263). These scholars link the potential of narrative as an engine for self-development with the irreducible singularity of autobiographical accounts, that they define as the situated stories. Situated stories represent “any narrative account of personal memory that is created within a specific situation, by particular individuals, for particular audiences, and to fulfil particular goals” (McLean et al. 2007: 263). The notion of situated stories provides an important link between the day to day operation of a person, the context of his or her life, the audiences that he or she is addressing, and both the stability and change of personal identity over the life course. Situated stories serve as a means of incremental narratively induced changes in the extended life story, potentially facilitating changes in self concept.

Similar refocusing of attention on small non-canonical stories and their interactional features has recently occurred in literary studies, as evident in the work of Alexandra Georgakopoulou on narrative constructions of self. She insists that a shift is necessary, from the question “what does narrative tell us about constructions of self?” to “how do we *do self* (and *other*) in narrative *genres* in a variety of *sites of engagement*?” (Georgakopoulou 2006: 125). Small stories—“an umbrella-term that covers a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell”—serve as a vehicle to enable such a shift. She argues that

In the context of a longstanding privileging of a certain kind of subjectivity, a certain kind of self and a certain type of narrative data through which to explore self, this shift can be seen as a new narrative turn, one that does not prioritise a unified, coherent, autonomous, reflected upon and rehearsed self. [...] Instead, one that allows for, indeed sees the need for a scrutiny of fleeting, contingent, fragmented and multiple selves. (Georgakopoulou 2006: 125)

Michael Bamberg (2010) supports Georgakopoulou's contention that “small story” research can solve a number of problems and shortcomings of more traditional “big story” research—a direction to which McAdams's work undoubtedly belongs.

Broadly speaking, it can be argued that McAdams is concerned with macrostructures and deep semantic structures of life stories that serve as a basis of an identity formation and as such his theorizing corresponds to the “classical” phase of narratology. Just like classical narratologists, McAdams privileges the study of narrative in general over the interpretation of individual texts. From a specifically psychological perspective, McAdams's model of redemptive self can be viewed as one of master narratives—the term coined to address how people engage in discourse using the repertoire of norms and expectations of a given culture (Bamberg 2004). This “big narrative” is encompassed by the assumption of psychological continuity and stability, which complements an assumption about narrative coherence within the model of identity as a life story.

## **Hermans's Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement**

Similarly to McAdams, Hermans addresses primarily two aspects of change within his model of dialogical self: a developmental aspect that he traces from birth to maturation in adult years, and a functional aspect, when the dialogical self is already in place but can modify itself depending on the context and events in a person's life. In contrast to McAdams, however, Hermans's model is not organised according to the progression through stages, and strives to accommodate not only movements towards coherence and continuity but also movements towards decentring and discontinuity. However, integration remains an ideal course of development in Hermans's model as well.

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka address the developmental aspects of the dialogical self in their book *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society*. They show that the emergence and development of a dialogical self is predicated not only on the acquisition of language, but also on a number of intersubjective interactional processes that start with the birth of an infant. In tracing these early predecessors of the later dialogical self, Hermans highlights the embodied nature of the dialogical self, the aspect that marks another significant difference from McAdams's model.

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka locate the earliest social precursors of the dialogical self in the neonatal imitation behaviour that involves a variety of facial, hand and finger movements and vocalizations that replicate and tune in to the behaviour of an adult caregiver. However, they highlight that young infants are also capable of provocation, actively seeking and eliciting reactions from others. As such, the succession of imitation and provocation is a precursor of turn-taking behaviour and exchange that characterize later dialogical processes. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka see a clear sign of growing intersubjectivity in an infant in the socially elicited smiling in face-to-face interaction with social partners that emerges between the first and second months. As they note, "Smiling emerges as a sign of mutuality and signifies an affective turning to the other" (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 202). Another crucial step in the development of a dialogical self takes place around 9 months when the child starts to perceive others as intentional. Not only does the child begin to construe others as intentional but also becomes able to perceive objects in the environment from the perspective of the other. This step is facilitated by the growing ability of the child to direct attention to the objects pointed out by a caregiver. In this process, gazing becomes a form of perspective taking. A particularly significant step in the development of the dialogical self takes place when the joint attention between caretaker and child becomes directed to the child itself. Consequently, a child becomes capable of self-reflective attention and forms an indirect perception of herself, that is, the perception through the perspective of a significant other. As Hermans and Hermans-Konopka conclude, "Along these lines the phenomenon of joint attention paves the way for inclusion of the other-in-the-self as a constitutive part of the self's extension to the world" (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 207).

Hermans traces further forms of non-verbal dialogue through giving and taking between mother and child in the first year of life. Hermans argues that in the processes of giving and taking of objects, the interaction between a significant other and a child has a clear dialogical structure, although the child has not yet mastered language. While the infant does not understand the words uttered by a parent, he or she reacts to the intonations and gestures of the caregiver. Even if this interaction is not yet sign-mediated, it represents a co-regulated activity, and as such works as a bodily foundation for dialogical activities. Hermans further links the ability for reversal of action that emerges at this stage with the Vygotskian account of interiorization and specifically its implications for self-regulated behaviour. According to Vygotsky, later in life the child has to take the position of the other towards herself in order to achieve control of her own behaviour.

During childhood years the extension of the self and emergence of new positions within it are further stimulated by role-play. Role-play generates multiple opportunities for exploring new positions and their inclusion in the self. With the development of linguistic capacities, the dialogical self receives a further boost. Caretakers routinely enter into conversations with young

children that provide initial training in verbal dialogue. Such conversations are often characterized by a high number of questions that an adult asks a child, but they also provide a model for a child to learn how to ask questions of a conversational partner. As Hermans and Hermans-Konopka argue, it is an important stage in the emergence of a dialogical self: “there is somebody who is competent as a conversational partner and via whom the self is driven into dialogicality” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 211). Moreover, through these initial dialogical interactions the child becomes “increasingly aware of the other’s attention and intention as belonging to the other” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 211). Drawing on Vygotsky’s ideas about interiorization, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka suggest attention and intention function as central factors in organizing the dialogue first with a conversational partner, and later between the child and herself. Hermans concludes that, “The interiorization of the dialogue with the other, into the self, functions as a developmental basis for the dialogical relationship with the other-in-the-self” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 211).

The linguistic competencies of a child, role-play, family dynamics and socialization through kindergarten and school lead to the formation of various positions within the emergent dialogical self. But in order to account for and understand the organization of dialogical self from a developmental perspective Hermans and Hermans-Konopka postulate a specific type of position, promoter positions, that focus “particularly on the temporal aspects of the self and organize the self over longer time-frames” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 228). Drawing on the work of Valsiner, an important contributor to the development of the dialogical self theory, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka delineate the following characteristics of promoter positions. Promoter positions are open towards the future and they have a generative potential. They are able to produce new qualitatively different positions within the self. They facilitate the integration of new and already existing positions in the self, in such a way that a more adaptive self emerges. They occupy a central place in the position repertoire and have the potential to reorganize the self towards the higher level of development. They ensure the continuity of the self, while at the same time they are able to accommodate the discontinuity.

Promoter positions play a key role in the multi-level model for the development of the self that Hermans and Hermans-Konopka introduce to account for the temporal aspect of dialogical self functioning. Graphically, the model represents a cylinder that consists of a number of circles positioned on top of each other and representing different developmental levels of the self (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 237). Hermans and Hermans-Konopka postulate three types of movements within the model: progressive, regressive and balanced. Progressive movements of the self entail moving up to a higher level of development, while regressive movements imply moving down to a lower level of development. The self can also be involved in balanced movements, when it moves within one and the same level. The development of self as a whole is not determined by age and does not entail movement through specific stages, but is prompted by important life events and the way the individual responds to these events. During the life course an individual may experience many upward or downward movements. The presence and availability of promoter positions are key in facilitating progressive movements. They can mitigate the impact of disorganizing events on the self, by making it possible to negotiate challenges and instigate the innovative dialogue with the potential new positions. Consequently, the movement towards a higher level of integration of self is stimulated. However, if promoter positions are not available, there is a risk that as a result of a disorganizing event the self will move down to a lower level of integration.

Furthermore, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka postulate centring and decentring movements on each level of self-organization. Centring movements go in the direction of the centre of the self, towards order and perfect integration. Decentring movements go away from the centre and undermine an existing organization and integration of the self. Each of these movements has positive and negative functions. Decentring movements engage with the increasing diversification of positions, and can potentially facilitate innovation of the self. However, they can lead to disorganization, chaos and fragmentation if they become overly dominant. Centring movements restore the organization of the self when an existing order is disrupted. However, if they become

overly dominant, the self is at risk of becoming rigid, fossilized and inflexible. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka highlight that while centring movements are emphasized in the modern model of the self, and decentering movements are characteristic of the postmodern model, his dialogical self model is constructed in such a way that it can incorporate both types of movements and, therefore, negotiate between modern and postmodern perspectives.

Overall, Hermans's model of the dialogical self appears to be considerably more open and dynamic than McAdams's notion of identity as a life story. However, closer analysis of Hermans's engagement with temporality, change and transformation reveals some limitations. In outlining these limitations it is instructive to examine foundational assumptions about the dynamic aspect of the dialogical self presented by Hermans and Kempen in *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement*. Inspired by Bakhtin's dialogism, the dialogical self model postulates that the *I* can move, in an imagined landscape, from the one to another position, from which different or even contrasting views of the world are possible. Moreover, like the voices in Dostoevsky's novels, from different spatial positions, multiple *Is* may enter into dialogical relationship, agreeing or disagreeing with each other, which may lead to the emergence of meanings that are not given at only one of the available positions.

In adopting Bakhtin's theorizing, Hermans and Kempen follow in particular Michael Holquist's (1990) architectonic conceptualization of Bakhtin's idea of polyphony, which accords great significance to spatial rather than temporal organization. Addressing the spatialization of temporal positions, Hermans and Kempen draw further analogies from the modernist novels of Gustave Flaubert, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein. These literary texts allow one to move beyond the understanding of narrative as intrinsically temporal, organized along the stages of beginning, development and ending. Instead, if time and space are accorded equal importance, narrative can be construed as open-ended. Such a view is essentially in accord with Bakhtin's thesis of "unfinalizability", which Hermans and Kempen adopt as a guiding principle in their model:

Narrative, conceived as a multiplicity of *I-positions*, means, in fact, that *each I*, as an author, has its own story to tell. This implies that there is not a single and final ending. Rather, a complex narrative with ongoing dialogical relationships between several positions assumes an open process that resists not only a final unification, but also a final completion. (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 60)

As a general outline of a theoretical framework, this premise appears to be promising, particularly with regard to addressing the possibility of change and reinstating an open—rather than a closed—temporal dimension. However, some of this conceptual richness gets lost in the development of a working, operationalized model.

The first theoretical move that Hermans and Kempen make to circumscribe the Bakhtinian notion of dialogue is through aligning dialogue tightly and inseparably with the dimension of power, or dominance. Drawing on the perspective of child psychology, and more remotely on Mead's social constructivism, Hermans and Kempen outline the following developmental progression: when children have reached the stage at which they are able to talk and think about themselves as *I* and *Me*, they have also reached a period in which society begins much more forcefully than before to influence and organize their world. Children start to be involved in dialogues, or rather, begin to be placed into various positions such as child, pupil or friend by various members of the community and family, parents, teachers and peers. In these positions children are addressed, not in a neutral way, but in ways that indicate approval or disapproval. In being able to address a child in a variety of positions, the community begins to impact on the organization of the self, making some of the *I-positions* more dominant than others. Hermans consequently argues that "dominance, as an intrinsic feature of dialogue, not only organizes but restricts the multiplicity of possible positions in the process of socialisation" (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 73). From this point, Hermans focuses on the operation of power in dialogue, delineating symmetrical relationships of turn-taking and asymmetrical relationships of dominance. As a result of such narrowing and qualifying of the notion of dialogue and tailoring it to the needs of social

psychology, in its final elaboration the dialogical self is defined by Hermans and Kempen as follows:

In the concept of “dialogical self” the notions of intersubjective exchange and dominance as the main features of dialogical relationships are applied to the self, considered as a multiplicity of *I*-positions. This means that a more or less intensive exchange between positions is supposed, with explicit attention to the relative dominance between positions. (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 78)

It can be seen that at this point Hermans’s definition of dialogue departs significantly from Bakhtin’s position. Dialogue, just like story, can be operationalized in various ways: just as story can be reduced to a set of consecutive functions, dialogue can be reduced to turn-taking. But as Bakhtin reminds us:

The internal dialogism [...] cannot fundamentally be dramatized or dramatically resolved (brought to an authentic end); it cannot ultimately be fitted into the frame of any manifest dialogue, into the frame of a mere conversation between persons; it is not ultimately divisible into verbal exchanges possessing precisely marked boundaries. (Bakhtin 1981: 326)

By contrast, in Hermans’s definition, dialogue is aligned with a stimulus—response, behaviouristic model, even machine-assisted interactions or computer interfaces. The complex and multi-layered original notion of dialogue, which, as Bakhtin insists, does not presuppose any resolution—even a dialectical one—is dissected and re-packed into a neat algorithm of an act-response sequence. The overriding Bakhtinian concern with freedom is substituted with a concern with dominance.

These limitations restrict both the notion of dialogue and the notion of self. Having delineated the structure of dialogue, Hermans sets out to “find in the realm of the self a basic structure that is similar to the basic structure that can be found for the notion of dialogue” (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 146). Drawing on previous research, Hermans and Kempen arrive at a description of self in terms of two basic motivational characteristics: one that strives for autonomy, and another that aims at interconnectedness. This allows Hermans and Kempen to postulate that, “The description of the self in terms of two basic motivational characteristics is highly similar to the two defining characteristics of the concept of dialogue that we have extensively discussed: dominance and intersubjective exchange” (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 147). Reciprocally, Hermans and Kempen assert the following isomorphism between structures of self and dialogue: “Self and dialogue have on a basic level two characteristics in common: (1) the separateness and autonomy of the self correspond with dominance in turn-taking behaviour; and (2) the openness and participation in the self correspond with the intersubjective exchange in dialogue” (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 147). Finally, Hermans and Kempen outline a research methodology to study the dialogical self, which can be formalized and operationalized in a structural fashion:

In sum, given the myriad of possible stories, which differ among people and also within the multivoiced mind of an individual person (each position has an own story to tell), it makes sense to distinguish two levels of functioning in the dialogical self: a manifest or surface level, and a latent or deeper level. The phenomenological variety of narratives, both between people and within the same individual, are on the manifest level. On a latent level of functioning, however, a limited number of basic forces or motives is supposed, influencing the content and organization of the stories on the manifest level. Note that the distinction between manifest and latent level applies not only to individual stories but also to collective stories (myths, fables, fairy tales, famous films, rumours in town, stories about economic recession, etc.). (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 148)

Similarly to McAdams, Hermans resorts here to a structuralist-style two-level narratological model grounded in the distinction between surface and depth. This has implications for the temporal dimension of Hermans’s dialogical self as well: as has been previously discussed, the assumption of a “basic” paradigmatic underlying structure that underpins various surface manifestations implies achronic temporality, temporality that is in principle closed. Starting with a valorization of Bakhtin’s concepts of unfinalizability, open-endedness and indeterminacy, Hermans finally arrives at a theoretical model that can hardly be reconciled with these categories.

To some extent this can be explained by the fact that Hermans draws on a particular aspect of Bakhtin's work, which reflects Dostoevsky's idiosyncratic manner of writing. As Morson (1994) observes, Bakhtin concentrated on a "highly intensified present", allowing historicity and temporality to recede into the background. Hermans might be replicating the same tendency.

This tendency becomes particularly obvious when one looks at the large body of empirical research that was inspired by Hermans's writing. A substantial proportion of these studies concentrate on the phenomenon of "*I* positioning", exploring which positions the moving *I* can occupy in a dialogical self. Positioning was introduced as "a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role" (Hermans et al. 1993: 217). Following Hermans's emphasis on dominance and exchange, particular attention was paid to dominant or submissive, dependent or independent, comforting or threatening positions and shifts between them. These studies adopted Hermans's methodology of the personal positioning repertoire, in which the participant nominates from an extensive list of dialogical positions (e.g. idealist, fearful, creative, vulnerable) those positions that are recognized as significant and which can then be rated and explored both quantitatively and qualitatively. This line of research is characterized largely by "the combination of an empirical conceptualization of positioning in terms of constructivist, binary scales, with the idea that positioning takes place in a space defined by a moral order" (Raggat 2006: 19). This research programme, therefore, focuses on the structural, atemporal organization of self. Within this context the issue of change and development is reformulated as the issue of a *shift* from one position to another. The development of personality is represented by a series of snapshots that remain disconnected from each other.

This goes against Bakhtin's insistence on constantly developing, unresolved, open-ended character of human life—what Bakhtin claims Dostoevsky's characters, as models of a truly dialogical and multivoiced approach to consciousness, embody: "inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within, and to render *untrue* any externalising and finalising definition of them" (Bakhtin 1973: 59). As Bakhtin further explains:

A man never coincides with himself. One cannot apply to him the formula of identity  $A=A$ . In Dostoevsky's artistic thinking, the genuine life of the personality takes place at the point of non-coincidence between a man and himself, at his point of departure beyond the limits of all that he is as a material being, a being that can be spied on, defined, predicted apart from its own will, "at second hand". (Bakhtin 1973: 59)

The issue of unfinalizability is particularly important if we want to draw some implications from the take on narrative in literary criticism to its appropriation in psychology. Since in the literary realm the model of completed and finished human life is a possibility in some genres, in psychology, which deals with a living, struggling human, such a model is problematic.

As with McAdams's appropriation of the concept of story, Hermans's attempt to transpose the idea of dialogue into the psychological domain demonstrates that such operations are accompanied by some loss of conceptual richness and explanatory potential.

### **White and Epston's Narrative Therapy: 'Storying' and 'Re-Storying' Lives**

Unlike McAdams and Hermans, for whom the point of departure is an elaboration of a model of self, for White and Epston the issue of change and time is of primary concern in itself. Reflecting on the early stages of his career, White highlights the importance of anthropologist Gregory Bateson's work for him by claiming that Bateson demonstrated "how the mapping of events through *time* is essential for the perception of difference, for the detection of change" (White and Epston 1990: 2). For White, this was a catalyst that drew his attention to a much neglected temporal direction in therapy. From there, White came to adopt the notion of narrative, since it requires "the location of events in cross-time patterns" (White and Epston 1990: 3). Generally, White and Epston are guided by an analogy between the unfolding of human life and narrative, or rather the role that narrative can play in this unfolding. In their "inaugural" therapeutic book *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* of 1990, they wrote:

Social scientists became interested in the text analogy following observations that, although a piece of behavior occurs in time in such a way that it no longer exists in the present by the time it is attended to, the meaning that is ascribed to the behavior survives across time. It was this ascription of meaning that drew their attention, and in their attempts to understand this they began to invoke the text analogy. This enabled the interaction of persons to be considered as the interaction of readers around particular texts. This analogy also made it possible to conceive of the evolution of lives and relationships in terms of the reading and writing of texts, insofar as every new reading of a text is a new interpretation of it, and thus a different writing of it. (White and Epston 1990: 9)

Expanding this analogy into the domain of therapy, White and Epston suggest that persons experience problems when there is a discrepancy between their lived experience and the narratives that describe this experience, and moreover there will be significant aspects of their lived experience that cannot be accounted for within these dominant narratives. Therefore, when people seek therapy the process should be aimed at the identification and formulation of alternative stories. These stories should enable the person to generate new meanings that they “will experience as more helpful, satisfying, and open-ended” (White and Epston 1990: 15).

Significantly, if for McAdams the therapeutic potential of a new story lies in its restored coherence, for White and Epston it is new narrative’s open-endedness that makes it helpful. Drawing on Barthes’s ideas on textual analysis and authorship, White and Epston note that stories as textual assemblages of facts, feelings and hypotheses are unstable and are reorganized with every retelling. Furthermore, the vector of such assemblages is aimed at the future. In their words:

Stories are full of gaps which persons must fill in order for the story to be performed. These gaps recruit the lived experience and the imagination of persons. With every performance, persons are reauthoring their lives. The evolution of lives is akin to the process of reauthoring, the process of persons” entering into stories, taking them over and making them their own.

Thus, in two senses, the text analogy introduces us to an intertextual world. In the first sense, it proposes that persons” lives are situated in texts within texts. In the second sense, every telling or retelling of a story, through its performance, is a new telling that encapsulates, and expands upon, the previous telling. (White and Epston 1990: 13)

White and Epston see the primary role of therapeutic engagement in assisting in such performative transformations. Their specific therapeutic techniques were inspired by Geertz’s notion of “thick description”. This notion implies the description of an event towards a broader, more meaningful account than an isolated observation would suggest. Similarly, the task of narrative therapists is to assist in generating a “thick description” of human experience without however seeking or providing an interpretation.

From there, therapy proceeds towards the identification of alternative stories or *unique outcomes*. White borrowed the term “unique outcome” from Erving Goffman, who suggested that “in structuring experience into any social strand of any person’s course through life [...] unique outcomes are neglected in favor of such changes over time that are basic and common to members of a social category, although occurring independently to each of them” (Goffman quoted in White 2007: 232). Unique outcomes therefore belong to the lived experiences that are not registered or given meaning, experiences that are not part of dominant stories of people’s lives. These out-of-phase experiences can reveal an individual’s ability to cope differently, unexpectedly or better with regard to their predicaments. For White, unique outcomes represent a major resource of narrative therapy as they can provide a point of entry for alternative storylines of people’s lives. Through “unique outcomes” White and Epston aim to tap into “those aspects of lived experience that fall outside of the dominant story and provide a rich and fertile source for generation, or re-generation, of alternative stories” (White and Epston 1990: 15).

David Epston connects the notion of unique outcomes with the notion of sideshadowing proposed by literary scholar Gary Saul Morson. By doing so Epston seeks to enrich the resource pool of alternatives available for people to construct their life stories. Morson introduces the notion of sideshadowing in his monograph *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, and argues that

sideshowing, a device overlooked by Bakhtin in his analysis, is the most important device developed by Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to represent temporal openness. Morson suggests that, in contrast to foreshadowing, which projects onto the present a shadow of the future, sideshadowing projects—from the “side”—the shadow of an alternative present. It allows us to see what might have been and therefore changes our view of what is:

In an open universe, the illusion is inevitability itself. Alternatives always abound, and, more often than not, what exists need not have existed. Something else was possible, and sideshadowing is used to create a sense of that “something else”. Instead of casting a foreshadow from the future, it casts a shadow “from the side”, that is, from the other possibilities. [...] Side shadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might-bes. While we see what did happen, we also see the image of what else could have happened. In this way, the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text. (Morson 1994: 118)

Sideshowing therefore defies the concept of inevitability and “restores the possibility of possibility” (Morson 1994: 119). It demonstrates the excess of potentialities over actualities, and it relies on a “concept of time as a field of possibilities” (Morson 1994: 199). Morson explores related notions of temporality such as past sideshadowing, pseudo-foreshadowing and processual intentionality, as well as actual narrative techniques that embody these markers of temporality in the text that work towards destabilizing the linear meaning or teleology of the text: gaps in the text or, the opposite device, “the extraordinary number of facts”, both of which aim at destabilizing consistency; the role of gossips; conditional tense; and “rumor as hero”.

Morson considers the greatest achievement of Tolstoy’s novels their resistance to any form of completeness, of a very possibility of a point at which all preceding elements could be grasped as part of a completed design, a point at which continuation would be superfluous:

Above all, Tolstoy wanted to change our habit of viewing our lives as if they resembled conventional narratives. Our lives have not been authored in advance, but are lived as we go along. They are process, not product, and every moment could have been different, for contingency always reigns. Time exists not under the foreshadow but accompanied by an ever-changing kaleidoscope of sideshadows. (Morson 1994: 172)

The appropriation of such a multifaceted understanding of narrative time by Epston contributes to the development of a more nuanced perspective on temporality and its critical use in narrative practice.

Another significant extension of narrative therapy with regards to the process of change is offered in White’s (2007) final book *Maps of Narrative Practice*. While the main direction of therapy remains the same—from “thick description” to the identification of “unique outcomes”—at this later stage White found in Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory a useful resource for facilitating change. In doing so White picks up the thread of theorizing initiated by Jerome Bruner some 50 years ago. In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* Jerome Bruner acknowledges that Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory became a powerful source of inspiration for him in forging a new paradigm in psychology, orientated around language and meaning. Commenting on a range of important concepts elaborated by Vygotsky—the paramount role of language in the development of consciousness, the notion of the zone of proximal development, the mediating role of signs and the instrumental role of thought and language—Bruner highlights that it was the last, Vygotsky’s instrumentalism, that struck him first and foremost. Quoting Vygotsky’s epigraph to *Thought and Language* drawn from Francis Bacon, “*Nec manus, nisi intellectus, sibi permissus, multant valent; instrumentis et auxilibus res perfictur*” [“Left to themselves, neither hand nor mind alone amounts to much; they are perfected by the instruments and aids that they employ”], Bruner positions “*instrumentis et auxilibus*” at the centre of the problematics of self-reflection, self-control and agency: “They provide a means for turning around upon one’s thoughts, for seeing them in a new light. This is, of course, mind reflecting on itself. [...] Consciousness plays an enormous role, consciousness armed with concepts and the language for forming and transforming them” (Bruner 1986c: 73).

While Hermans makes some references to Vygotsky's ideas about agency and self-regulation, he does not fully unpack the scope of Vygotskian concepts, nor does he address their implications for adult development in a way that White does. White places great emphasis on Vygotsky's exploration of concepts as tools of mental activity. He highlights that language occupies a central place for Vygotsky because it is understood as a principal means of integration and reorganization of mental life and the very basis of thought. For Vygotsky, as Bruner and Rieber note, "language is both a result of historical forces that have given it shape and a tool of thought that shapes thought itself" (Bruner and Rieber 2004: 10). As with other cultural tools, its use starts in a social context of interaction between a child and an adult, and then it gradually "grows" inward, creating a plane of inner speech that is used by an individual to regulate his or her own behaviour. What is achieved through the use of language goes beyond coordination and reorganization of lower mental functioning, and is posited by Vygotsky as a means of "freeing" a man from biological and historical constraints. He says, "We could not describe the new significance of the whole operation any better than to say that it represents a mastery of behavioural process itself" (Vygotsky 2004: 362). For Vygotsky such mastery of one's own behaviour provides a solution to the problem of agency and volition, as by using signs to regulate his own behaviour "man himself creates the connection and ways for his reacting; he reconstructs the natural structure; with the help of signs, he subordinates to his will processes of his own behaviour" (Vygotsky 2004: 362). As Wertsch (1985) demonstrates, this achievement is predicated on the inherent potential in the acquisition of language for the concepts to become decontextualized. This allows for their self-reflexive use and the distributed and sign-mediated character of regulation of behaviour.

These ideas exert a powerful influence on White, who writes: "By this account, personal agency is not the simple outcome of human nature and its liberation or the product of developmental imperative. Rather, it is social collaboration in the development of word meaning that is essential to the attainment of personal agency and responsible action" (White 2007: 280). In concluding thus White also highlights the significant role that Vygotsky attributes to the social context of development. The regulative function of signs is for Vygotsky inextricably linked with social life and its demands and constraints. It is within this social context, and the context of interacting with close adults who regulate a child's behaviour by giving him/her instructions that later become redirected by the child onto himself/herself, that the road to self-regulated behaviour emerges.

Interaction with more knowledgeable others is crucial for this process, as surmised in the Vygotskian notion of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). This zone is characterized by the distance between what the child can learn and achieve independently and what is possible for the child to learn and achieve in collaboration with others. Vygotsky defines the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1986: 86). Traversing this zone is a challenge for a child and is predicated on the child's ability to distance himself or herself from the immediacy of his or her experience. According to Vygotsky this process needs to be mediated by a caretaker who will break the task into manageable operations and "scaffold" the journey for the child.

Drawing on Vygotsky's ideas about the mediating role of concepts and the notion of the ZPD, White in his last work defines the essence of the therapeutic process as "scaffolding", in which the therapist's role is precisely that: constructing a scaffold for a therapeutic conversation to take place. An important aspect of such an intervention is to introduce the idea that concepts (such as self-determination, self-esteem, freedom) do not represent essences but rather should be understood as cultural tools, which can be used to organize behaviour. White characterizes such procedures as "distancing" and postulates several potential levels of distancing—from low to very high—within therapeutic conversation. Furthermore, drawing on Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD, and the fact that foray into this zone is only possible in collaboration with a significant other, White conceptualizes the therapeutic progress and process as a traversing of such a zone. The therapist occupies a role similar to the role of the significant other who provides "the sort of conversational partnership that supports people in proceeding in manageable steps" (White 2007:

275). The therapeutic aim is now defined as a rich story development, which mirrors in a way “thick description” of the initial stage, but is decisively future orientated and open-ended:

The distance that can be travelled in one therapeutic conversation from the starting point of a unique outcome to destinations in new territories of life and identity is often truly remarkable. Furthermore, it is entirely impossible to predict this destination at the outset. In my experience with these conversations, the only thing that can safely be predicted is that the outcome will defy any prediction. This is one of the entralling aspects of engaging with these narrative practices. In the context of these conversations we remain “in suspense” with regard to the outcome, knowing only that at the end of the conversation we will be standing in territories of life and identity that we couldn’t have imagined at the outset. (White 2007: 251)

Overall, White and Epston’s understanding of change is in accord with the Vygotskian approach to human development, which insists on the necessity of focusing on processes rather than outcomes, understands development as a multi-trajectory, non-linear process, and emphasizes its autopoietic, e.g. self-making, aspect.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, their ideas about therapeutic change resonate powerfully with Vygotsky’s most radical view, which suggests that development should be understood not as a process of incremental quantitative gains along the lines of growth and maturation, but in terms of revolutionary qualitative shifts. Such understanding of development highlights the human potential for transformation. As such, the narrative practice advocated by White and Epston is not only the most sensitive to the contingency and incalculability of life, it is the one that is most attuned to freedom.

## Conclusion

As the analysis in this chapter demonstrates, the various understandings of narrative are informed by two poles, or functions: on the one side, it has an important function of providing cohesion and integrating separated elements within a larger framework and, by doing so, facilitating the generation of meaning. On the other, narrative can be implicated with interruption and break, and has internal mechanisms that allow it to become an event-generating as well as a meaning-generating tool. While the first function is critical with regard to maintaining the continuity and cohesion of psychological functioning, the second function appears to be necessary to account for changes and transformation.

While formalist and structuralist studies of narrative valorized such features and functions of narrative as cohesion and continuity, with a move towards stability and resolution, the line of argument stretching from post-narrative to poststructural thought mobilized concepts of multiplicity, flux and excess to demonstrate how narrative is implicated in the very process of transformation. The concepts generated by poststructuralist, postmodern and post-narratological thought challenge and qualify the trend to expand one of the central functions of narrative—integration and cohesion—to an exclusive understanding of narrative as a stabilizing force and a means of peace-making. These conceptual developments outline the internal mechanisms of transformation embedded in narrative and narrativity, demonstrate the ability of narrative to go beyond reflection and representation, and thus make possible the use of narrative as a means and a tool of psychological change and development.

A conflict between static and dynamic definitions of narrative bears directly on the understanding of the nature and scope of stability and change of identity. That seems to be a significant factor in the appropriation of the notion of narrative by McAdams, Hermans, and White and Epston. As with many other aspects of understanding of narrative, the view on these important issues seems to change particularly from post-structural and postmodern perspectives.

While there is seemingly a provision for change in McAdams’s model of personality functioning, a closer analysis reveals that McAdams’s theorizing limits the extent and nature of possible changes. McAdams’s strictly chronological understanding of development following Erikson’s eight stages sequence of identity changes across the lifespan provides a restricted model of the temporal dimension to personality. Furthermore, McAdams’s particular take on the concept of

the story is considerably influenced by formalist and structuralist approaches. Identity as a life story is understood by McAdams both as a deep structure, similar to the concept proposed by Lévi-Strauss in his studies of myth, and is articulated as a formulaic plot-episode sequence, as suggested by Propp in relation to fairytale. As such, this model operates with an “achronic” and closed understanding of time, delimiting the possible extent of change: there is no room for real contingency, unpredictability or spontaneity in human life. Overall, McAdams’s view on developmental aspects of identity privileges modern values of equilibrium, stasis, predictability and closure over postmodern emphasis on instability, flux and chance.

While Hermans’s theory of the dialogical self provides a more open and dynamic way to address change than McAdams’s notion of identity as a life story, the former also has limitations. In particular, my analysis shows that Hermans has significantly simplified Bakhtin’s ideas of dialogue. For Bakhtin dialogue constitutes an encounter of two subjectivities as equal, an encounter that is predicated on the incommensurability of different human worlds. Furthermore, this is an incommensurability that cannot be resolved, even dialectically, but presupposes a complex unity of differences. In contrast, Hermans reduces dialogue to the dynamics of turn-taking in conversation, focusing narrowly on issues of power and dominance. Dialogue in Hermans’s reductive theorizing becomes two-dimensional, with the status of a “channel” in the communicative situation. While for Bakhtin, dialogue represents a way of accounting for the unfinalizability of human life and the excess of humanness, Hermans’s paradigm seriously delimits the explanatory power of dialogue and its ability to address the dynamic issues raised by the problematic of change.

In contrast to these two approaches White and Epston’s therapeutic model not only makes a provision for psychological change, but also places the temporal dimension at the very core of the model. The impetus behind White and Epston’s theorizing is a general analogy between the unfolding of human life and narrative. This approach differs from those of McAdams and Hermans in several important respects. While all three approaches adopt some kind of textual analogy, in White and Epston’s model this analogy doesn’t imply any particular content or subject matter. The metaphor of narrative therapy does not presuppose particular development stages or social functions, and there is no assumption that the variety of human stories can be reduced to certain basic structures (shared by both Hermans and McAdams), or, moreover, that there might be a particular ideal scenario for the developing of life story, such as the redemptive self. The nature of narrativity corresponds to the nature of life experience in that they are both fluid and evolving, and that they come together at the point of generating meaning, a meaning that is, however, open to constant revision.

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## 4. NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY

### How Psychology Makes Itself True — or False

As has been discussed previously, the emergence and development of psychology as a scientific discipline was deeply intertwined with the culture of modernism. As Polkinghorne poignantly observes, “The story of academic psychology is a subplot within the story of modernism. Psychology as an academic discipline originated as a purposeful effort to apply the epistemological principles of Enlightenment science to the study of human beings” (Polkinghorne 1992: 146). This had significant implications for methodological issues in psychology, both for methodology as the theoretical underpinning of research on the one hand, and as methods and techniques employed to collect and analyse data on the other. The ideal of knowledge and the scientific character of the discipline have been closely bound up with the model of experimental science borrowed from the natural sciences. Despite the widespread revision of what constitutes knowledge that has taken place in the Humanities through poststructural and postmodern critiques, academic psychology has remained committed to some significant assumptions and maxims of modernism. Unlike many other scientific practices that have become consciously aware of their location within a historical paradigm, to a large degree as a result of incorporating Kuhn’s (1962) insight, psychology has been slow to acknowledge the situated character of knowledge. Gergen (2001) highlights several modern assumptions that continue to shape the understanding and practice of psychology: the centrality of individual knowledge, the assumption of the world as objectively given, and the understanding of language as a carrier of truth. These views are clearly discernible in academic psychology in the broadly shared assumptions that “(a) mental processes are available for objective study [...], (b) mental processes are related in a causal manner to environment inputs on the one hand and to behavioural consequences on the other, and (c) the experimental method is superior to all others in capturing these causal relationships” (Gergen 2001: 805).

The critique of this position has been articulated most strongly from constructivist and social constructionist positions. The constructivist approach was introduced by George Kelly (1955), whose seminal work on personal construct psychology focuses on individual processes of constructing representations of self and world (Mahoney 1991). Social constructionist approaches emphasize the society rather than the individual, and focus on discursive practices within which individuals are embedded (Burr 1995). From this perspective, “what one takes to be real, what one believes to be transparently true about human functioning, is a by-product of communal construction”, which observation encompasses the concept of self and personality as well. As Gergen argues,

this conception of the person is an outgrowth of a particular tradition — including both its linguistic genre and the institutions in which they are embedded. This conception of the person cannot itself be verified or falsified through observation; rather, a linguistic forestructure is essential to direct and interpret whatever observations one does make. (Gergen 2001: 806—807)

What is at stake in this discussion is not only the status of psychological knowledge but the status of psychology as a discipline. As Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested in his deliberation on the occasion of the centenary of psychology as a science, psychology, unlike natural sciences and more than any other social science, operates not only in a descriptive mode, but also in a prescriptive one. The question of, “How psychology makes itself true — or false” is predicated on the fact that the “cultural impact of psychology is two-fold: it provides new models for self-knowledge and a partially new self for us to have knowledge of. [...] Hence the self’s knowledge of itself and its making of itself are indeed two aspects of one and the same process” (MacIntyre 1985: 898). MacIntyre elaborates this point with particular emphasis on methodology: “the question may always arise of whether the account is true because of the accuracy of the methods of observation used by the psychologist who formulated it or whether it is true because the people in question embodied that psychologist’s account in their own intentions and thereby behaviour”

(MacIntyre 1985: 898). The distinction between epistemology and ontology in psychology thus becomes blurred, as our ways of constructing knowledge impact on the nature of what is known.

In this context, narrative psychology, as an umbrella term, provides a unifying framework for a range of diverse approaches: while some developments within this broad approach are aligned with constructivist and social constructionist camps in their critique of the paradigm of positivism within which academic psychology largely operates today, other approaches remain closer to the existing “positivist” discourse of the discipline. This chapter first examines the methodological assumptions informing McAdams’s model, Hermans’s dialogical self theory, and Epston and White’s narrative therapy, and then examines closely research methods and practices associated with each of these perspectives.

### **‘Narrative Identity Empiricized’: Protocols for Narrating the Self**

For McAdams the advantage of narrative methodology relates to its promise to reconcile the demands of formal scientific methods with the realm of human individuality, or *nomothetic* and *idiographic* knowledge.

While idiographic approaches concentrate on one or more individuals in whom various characteristics occur, nomothetic approaches focus on the distribution and correlations of characteristics across a population. According to McAdams, reconciling the different demands of analytic, quantitative and nomothetic studies on the one hand and synthetic, qualitative and idiographic inquiries on the other has been a central conundrum for personality psychology since Wilhelm Wundt laid the foundations of psychology as a formal and experimental science. In this context narrative approaches offer a way to integrate knowledge about the individual with statistics describing groups and means (McAdams 2006b).

However, for McAdams, adopting a narrative approach does not require a reconsideration of the underlying tenets of mainstream psychology; it is yet another model that can be incorporated without questioning the major assumptions of how science gets done—such as that the object exists independently of knowledge, that narrative methods can reveal a consistent and coherent representation of reality that is independent of the methods themselves, and that the researcher can stay neutral in the process of acquiring knowledge about it.

The methodology developed by McAdams to conduct research on narrative identity starts with collecting stories. However, the collection of stories for McAdams is a guided, controlled and structured process. At the start of the interview interviewees are introduced to the very idea of life as story and are told about the expectations of the researcher:

This is an interview about the *story* of your life. We are asking you to play the role of storyteller about your own life — to construct for us the story of your own past, present, and what you see as your own future. People’s lives vary tremendously, and people make sense of their own lives in a tremendous variety of ways. As social scientists, our goal is to collect as many different life stories as we can in order to begin the process of making sense of how people make sense of their own lives. Therefore, we are collecting and analyzing life stories of “normal” adults from all walks of life, and we are looking for significant commonalities and significant differences in those life stories that people tell us.<sup>1</sup>

A more specific suggestion is then made to organize a life story according to narrative conventions, including chapters, scenes, plots and characters:

We would like you to begin by thinking about your life *as a story*. All stories have characters, scenes, plots, and so forth. There are high points and low points in the story, good times and bad times, heroes and villains, and so on. A long story may even have chapters. Think about your life story as having at least a few different chapters. What might those chapters be? I would like you to describe for me each of the main chapters of your life story. You may have as many or as few chapters as you like, but I would suggest dividing your story into at least two or three chapters and at most about seven. If you can, give each chapter a name and describe *briefly* the overall

contents in each chapter. As a storyteller here, think of yourself as giving a plot summary for each chapter. This first part of the interview can expand forever, so I would like you to keep it relatively brief, say, within 20—25 minutes. Therefore, you don't want to tell me “the whole story” now. Just give me a sense of the story's outline — the major chapters in your life.<sup>2</sup>

The interview then proceeds to develop detailed accounts of (a) a life story high point, (b) a low point, (c) a turning point, (d) the earliest memory, (e) a significant childhood scene, (f) a significant adolescent scene, and (g) one other significant scene of the narrator's choosing. The third part of the interview focuses on life challenges, while the fourth explores positive and negative characters in the story. The fifth part is dedicated to the description of a future script (including positive and negative versions), while the sixth encompasses the domain of ideology—personal beliefs and values. Finally, the subjects are asked to identify the central theme in their life story: “Looking back over your entire life story as a story with chapters and scenes, extending into the past as well as the imagined future, can you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme of your life story? Explain.”<sup>3</sup>

Such types of interviews are defined as semi-structured in experimental psychology and depart from more rigorously controlled procedures in that they don't provide their subjects with a standard set of closed questions, but allow some freedom of expression. As can be seen, the instructions in the interview also provide training for the participants with regard to what actually constitutes a story and how they should structure their experience to adequately present them to the researcher.

Significantly, though, McAdams's assumptions about a story's structure, plot development and “genre” are in line with structuralist frameworks of literary and linguistic analysis. William Labov's seminal work is often credited as a model of a linguistic approach to the study of narrative, and significant parallels can be discerned between his and McAdams's approaches to narrative analysis. Drawing on Propp's ideas, Labov elaborated a model of narrative structure comprised of six interrelated clauses: the *abstract* provides a summary of the narrative; the *orientation* introduces the general scene; the *complication* represents the main body of narrative and is terminated by a result; the *evaluation* accompanies the narrative and indicates to the listener the relative importance of the narrated events; and the *coda* or *afterword* contains a reflection on the whole narrative (Labov 1982; Labov and Waletzky 1967). Similar assumptions regarding narrative structure inform McAdams's description of life story. As such, McAdams's approach not only adopts a narrative perspective but also a particular structuralist understanding of narrative as coherent, singular and linear.

However, recent scholarship on narrative draws attention to the limitations of the Labovian approach, and this critique can be extended to its appropriation by McAdams. In his analysis of narrative analytical techniques Michael Murray warns that “the very interview process may encourage a certain structure for those accounts”, and highlights the problematic status of narrative coherence (Murray 2003: 104). Murray further argues that striving for coherence, linearity, seamlessness and homogeneity can be seen as an effect of dominant Western assumptions about the unitary subject, the linear unfolding of human lives and the centrality of the author of the story on subjectivity. Wendy Patterson draws attention to another limitation of the Labovian approach, pointing out that “within a strictly Labovian analysis, there is no allowance made for the inevitably *partial* and *constructed* nature of any account of personal experience” (Patterson 2008: 30).

Moreover, as has been shown in Chap. 4, McAdams maintains that storytelling encompasses two levels, surface and deep, and that it is on the latter that the “true meaning” of the story resides—and this is what is valuable from the point of view of the psychologist. The earlier stages of McAdams's work were devoted to a search for significant themes as a reflection of basic motives. McAdams defined themes as recurrent patterns of motivational content in stories, which he narrowed down to two superordinate motives: agency (power/achievement/autonomy) and communion (love/intimacy/belonging). The methodology employed at this stage was within the classical experimental paradigm and the use of reductionist statistical procedures. McAdams's

own concern with regards to methodology was connected to the issue of balancing nomothetic and idiographic modes of research.

McAdams's focus then moved to an analysis of the dominant recurring themes in stories, not as a reflection of underlying motives but as a combination of the work of social myths, mass culture, everyday beliefs and personal aspirations. As has been discussed previously, in the wake of the cultural shock of September 11, 2001, McAdams put forward the idea that a substantial proportion of American adults share a common construction of the self, one which he defined as "redemptive". While the concept, features and origin of the "redemptive self" were described in the previous chapters, it is worth reconsidering them now from a methodological point of view. The very notion of the "basic structure of the storied self" is analogous to the search for a basic structure in myths, fairytales and other literary genres that informed narratological research in the heyday of structuralism, while its "content" resonates with several important modern themes. For example, Ken Plummer (1995) proposed five basic plots of modernist fiction: (1) taking a journey, (2) engaging in a contest, (3) enduring suffering, (4) pursuing consummation and (5) establishing a home. He further suggested that these tales share the common elements of (a) suffering that gives tension to the narrative, (b) a crisis or turning point or epiphany and (c) a transformation. This underlying structure bears a remarkable resemblance to the sequence of components in the redemptive self model, which reveals its fundamental affinity with a modern perspective.

However, what requires even more critical attention is the unproblematic adoption by McAdams of the structuralist model of the relationship between surface and deep structures. In the light of poststructuralist critique, as outlined in Chap. 4, this model has been reconsidered and challenged. The paradoxes and limitations of the notion of the hypothetical basic story are not taken into account in McAdams's model of the storied self. Furthermore, McAdams acknowledges, but only to a limited degree, the impact of social-learning factors as contributing to the emergence of a common "basic story". These factors, as Smith observes, include

(1) the similarity of our individual prior experiences of particular individual telling of a particular story; (2) the similarity of the particular ways in which almost all of us have learned to talk about stories generally; and (3) the fact that all of us, in attempting to construct a plot or summary in this particular context and in connection with these particular issues, would be responding to similar conditions and constraints. (Smith 1980: 212)

Another aspect of McAdams's methodology worth noting is that, while the demographic characteristics of his respondents receive due acknowledgement (McAdams states that he conducts his research with middle-aged adults of both sexes), no consideration is given to the characteristics of the interviewers. This issue has already been recognized in ethnography, anthropology and research on oral biography. David Dunaway formulates this point succinctly in addressing method and theory in oral biography:

Interviewers should reflect on the cultural roles they assume, their personality, and other facts concerning their function in the society studied. This problem is familiar to the director of any large oral history programme: should interviewers be chosen by sex, age, race? If so, should these duplicate, complement, or contrast with the interviewee's background? The point here is that the interviewer—interviewee interaction cannot be taken for granted in designing or recording oral history. (Dunaway 2006: 244)

Moreover, many scholars argue that the interviewer becomes a party contributing to the co-authoring of the story and treats the interview as a co-constructive research method (Kvale 1996). Murray highlights the significance of social context more generally, arguing that, "This question regarding the relative contribution of the different participants in shaping a narrative is an ongoing challenge facing the narrative researcher in collecting and analyzing narrative accounts" (Murray 2003: 99).

But to acknowledge the contextual variables and the unique way in which each story is plotted and told is to break the very foundation of the paradigm within which McAdams is working: namely, the logic of positivism, in which, in order to acquire the status of "true" and "significant", knowledge must adhere to the criteria of confirmability, generalizability, reliability and empathic

neutrality. McAdams, a social scientist by trade and cognitive psychologist by training, recognizes this tension as a tension between idiographic and nomothetic research in psychology. For him, a model of the self as a life story provides a conceptual and methodological bridge between these two modes: “It may be through the narrative approach that personality psychology will eventually make significant headway in reconciling its historical divide between nomothetic and idiographic ways of understanding persons” (McAdams 2006b: 14).

The insistence on uncovering a generalized knowledge, a “true picture of self”, is in accord with another significant feature of McAdams’s approach—his essentialist treatment of self. The self is understood by McAdams as a given that should be revealed in the process of analysis. Even though McAdams appears to be willing to acknowledge the contribution of culture to the construction of self, all of his interests—the mythology of American life, the preoccupation with mass culture and the contemporary configurations of self—constitute ontological realities rather than “constructions” in his view. While acknowledging that individuals are introduced to certain cultural codes that bear on their construction of self, all components of this process are no more than steps in the uncovering of a basic or final truth that both the culture and the individual self contain at their core. The ideological component that is at work in the cultural production remains bracketed as well.

Moreover, it can be argued that McAdams’s theory operates in as much a prescriptive as a descriptive mode, making a substantial contribution to the further colonization of the “common” American psyche with the idea of the redemptive self. The last sentence in his panegyric to narrative identity, speculating about a particular person’s story—“I bet it will be a story of redemption” (McAdams 2006c: 298)—encapsulates the powerful performative injunction the book delivers. Much more a *tour de force* of rhetoric than an exercise in cultural criticism, McAdams’s *Redemptive Self*, addressed to a broad range of readers—“psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, and historians, but also [to] just about anyone who would like to know what it is that distinguishes Americans from others in the rest of the world” (Sternberg 2008)—represents as much an important act of constructing this hypothetical American identity as of articulating it.

### **The Dialogical Self Theory, Valuation Theory and the Self-Confrontation Method**

The dialogical self theory, elaborated by Hubert Hermans and his school, purports to extend the storytelling metaphor into the research and therapeutic spheres. In 2002, reflecting on more than 30 years of research work, Hermans wrote:

As a researcher in the field of personality I started, at the end of the sixties, to construct tests for the measurement of achievement motivation and fear of failure. [...] Dissatisfaction, however, with the objectifying and impersonal nature of these tests, with the separation between assessment and change, and with the rather limited value range of such instruments, motivated me to search for alternatives. (Hermans 2002: 3)

Drawing inspiration from William James and George Kelly’s work, Hermans “came to realize that the most appropriate way to characterize the way in which people give form to their own lives is to phrase it in terms of the metaphor of the motivated storyteller”, which provided “a fertile starting point for both theory and practice” (Hermans 2002: 3). Thus, it would appear that Hermans is articulating a critique of the formal scientific paradigm, identifying the limits of its applicability in the human sciences. However, as further analysis shows, the scope of critique is considerably narrower: while it does go against the cognitive-behaviour framework, it leaves the premises of positivistic science untouched.

The metaphor of the motivated storyteller at the core of Hermans’s model is complemented by the assumption of dialogism. However, these ideas appear to have little bearing on the methodology that Hermans employs in his research programme. Hermans’s main research tool is represented by *valuation theory* and *self-confrontation method*. Already in the title one can sense a shift in rhetorical register—from the vocabulary of story and dialogue inspired by literary study

and phenomenological philosophy, to the terminological stock in trade of social-learning and cognitive-behaviour theory.

Valuation theory is supposed to bring together story, telling and motivation of the guiding metaphor as parts of an articulated conceptual system:

The central concept, “valuation” refers both to the process of meaning construction and its product in which the events of a self-narrative are organized. A valuation has a positive (pleasant), negative (unpleasant) or ambivalent connotation in the eyes of the individual. Personal valuations, as subjective constructions of personal experiences, refer to a broad range of phenomena such as: a dear memory, a pleasant activity, a good talk with a friend, a disappointment in the contact with a significant other, a particular source of satisfaction in one’s work, a physical handicap, an unreachable ideal, etc. During different periods of one’s life, different valuations may emerge because one’s reference point is constantly changing. As a result of the act of self-reflection different valuations are brought together into an organized valuation system in which one valuation is given a more prominent place than another. (Hermans 2002: 6)

Valuations are technical means of depicting the meaning of a story. It is noticeable, however, how quickly—in the space of the paragraph quoted above—story as a concept is virtually eliminated and substituted by something very different: a dismembered account that concurs more with the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode of knowledge rather than with its narrative organization. Story is cut into non-narrative units, “valuations”, consisting sometimes of a single sentence.

This logic is amplified in the self-confrontation method, which represents the core of Hermans’s methodology. The self-confrontation method invites a person (subject or client) to perform a thorough self-investigation consisting of three parts: (a) the construction of a set of valuations; (b) rating each of the valuations using a list of affective terms; and (c) discussion of the results.

The data acquired as a result of the application of the self-confrontation procedure is represented by numerical values corresponding to the ratings assigned by the subjects to different variables, that can be arranged as a matrix. This kind of quantitative analysis conforms to the standard logic and criteria of experimental research, allowing a further application of statistical procedures aimed at comparisons of groups, rather than individuals, and reifying such types of analysis as a regression or factor analysis as a result of which the number of variables bearing on the construction of meaning can be further reduced.

Hermans treats the phenomenological richness of personal valuations, which may vary not only between individuals but also within a single individual across time and space, as the *manifest* level of the self. He insists that analysis should move on to the *latent* level, where a limited number of basic motives exist and are reflected in the affective component of the valuation system. The study of the affective component can therefore reveal which particular motive is active in a particular valuation and in the system as a whole. Hermans postulates two basic motives: striving for self-enhancement, or S motive (self-maintenance and self-expansion), and the longing for contact and union with the other, or O motive (interaction with other people and participation in the surrounding world). He finds support for this model in the works of David Bakan (1966), Andras Angyal (1965) and Ludwig Klages (1948)—works produced in the mid-twentieth century by thinkers who all shared broadly modern assumptions about human nature. It can be argued thus that the privileging of motives of achievement and connection are in accord with a particular historical view of personality, motivation and emotions.

The main critique however should be directed not at the content of Hermans’s reductionist analysis, but, more importantly, at the reductionist procedure itself. In light of the problematization of the relationship between deep and manifest structure undertaken in literary study, Hermans’s insistence on the uncovering of deep structure in the work of human agents as storytellers reveals a dichotomous understanding of narrative, which is typical of the structuralist analysis. The singularity of the narrative act is not acknowledged: abstract, disembodied or subsumed entities that represent a “basic structure” leave very little of the manifest, material telling presented by people who undertake self-confrontation research.

Perhaps, most significantly, the real addressee of such telling remains unclear. This issue deserves special consideration in light of Hermans's intention to approach the self as a dialogical phenomenon. However, on a methodological level, Hermans redefines dialogue along the lines of social-learning theory: "When there is a story, there is always someone who tells the story to someone else. It is the dialogical reciprocity between teller and listener that makes storytelling a highly dynamic interactional phenomenon" (Hermans 2002: 9). Further, the researcher is positioned as a dialogical partner of the client or subject:

The concept of telling implies that the person, as an author relating about him- or herself as an actor, is part of a dialogical relationship in which the conversational partner (e.g., the psychologist) co-constructs the person's self-narrative. Clients are considered as experts in their personal meanings, whereas psychologists function as experts on theoretical and methodological issues and, moreover, have experience with a larger group of clients. (Hermans 2002: 9)

There is certainly an exchange of information happening in this interaction, but can it be defined as dialogical?

In the sense elaborated by Bakhtin, dialogical communication is not only a multiplicity and diversity of voices, a "heteroglossia", but an act of (and an active) listening to each voice from the perspective of the others, a "dialogised heteroglossia". Furthermore, the context in which dialogical interaction takes place (not acknowledged in Hermans's research) has a tremendous weight in Bakhtinian elaborations of the theory. In "The Problem of Speech Genres", Bakhtin (1986) claims that the sentence, considered as a unit of language in traditional disciplines, has only the context of the speech of one speaking (or writing) subject. The utterance, in contrast, considered as a unit of spoken (or written) communication, is situated within the framing context of an exchange of speaking (or writing) subjects. Thus, the utterance, unlike the sentence, correlates directly with "the extraverbal context of reality (situation, setting, prehistory)" and with the utterances of other speakers (Bakhtin 1986: 73). As "a link in the chain of speech communication", the utterance has several distinguishing characteristics: a referentially semantic element (its theme), an expressive element (the speaker or writer's attitude towards the theme) and, most importantly, an element of responsiveness or "*addressivity*" (its relation to other utterances) (Bakhtin 1986: 84, 90, 91, 95).

Set against these Bakhtinian concepts, the relationship between the psychologist and the subject of the self-confrontation research method could only be defined as quasi-dialogical, while the real dialogical partners of a subject remain outside this interaction, as well as outside the laboratory walls. However, the narrative message elicited in the procedure is addressed to these dialogical partners, and it is they who are critical in determining its meaning. Within the laboratory the only element of the interaction that comes close to dialogue is the one related to the demands of the experimental situation itself: the researcher asks a subject to perform certain tasks and a subject performs them—willingly, reluctantly or unwillingly. However, in accordance with the demand of experimental science these factors are bracketed and an illusion is created that in the dialogical process the subject reveals some truth about his/her life in the real world.

Overall, this analysis reveals fundamental tension between Bakhtin's radical rethinking of the methodologies of the social sciences and Hermans's commitment to the methodological assumptions of mainstream psychology. The process of development and elaboration of Hermans's model illustrates how, at each move, Bakhtinian concepts are cleansed of heterogeneity, "brought into line" with the psychological discourse of observable, verifiable, reproducible, schematic and common characteristics that are congruent with the meta-language of theoretism that Bakhtin so radically opposed. For Bakhtin this bears on the possibility of any externalizing definition of character—including narrative definition:

An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing sociohistorical categories. There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he could exhaust himself down to the last word, like the tragic or epic hero; no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash

over the brim. There always remains an unrealized surplus of humanness; there always remains a need for the future, and a place for this future must be found. (Bakhtin 1981: 37)

There is thus a significant divergence between Hermans's operationalized model of dialogical self theory and the implications of Bakhtin's philosophical insight for the methodological aspects of psychology. The reason is perhaps best defined by Per Linell (1998) who suggests that an inadequate use of dialogism as an analytical tool by a range of disciplines that appropriated it is the result of a failure to grasp the concept's role in intellectual history—specifically, its position within the philosophical and philological contexts where dialogism refers not to a specific format of a narrative text, but to a conglomerate of problems in the study of human language, communication and consciousness.

## The Maps of Narrative Practice

Unlike Hermans and McAdams, many of the aspects of whose methodological approaches fit without problem into the existing methodological framework of academic psychology, White and Epston began their work by challenging the premises of mainstream psychology—the positivist assumption “that it is possible to have direct knowledge of the world” (White and Epston 1990: 4). For this they substituted the interpretative method based on the assumption “that any statement that postulates meaning is interpretive” (White and Epston 1990: 4). White and Epston stress that “these statements are the outcome of an inquiry that is determined by our maps or analogies” (White and Epston 1990: 5).

In a self-reflexive exercise designed to delineate their position with regard to the multiple analogies available to the social sciences, White and Epston (1990: 6) constructed a table of analogies (see Table 4.1).

**Table 5.1**

Analogy in social sciences (after White and Epston 1990: 6)

Analogy drawn from	Social organization constructed as	Problems constructed as	Solutions constructed in terms of
1. Positivist physical sciences	Elaborate machine, constituted by mechanics and hydraulics	Breakdown, reversal, insufficiency, damage	Isolating cause, precise analysis, repair, reconstruct, correct
2. Biological sciences	Quasi-organism	Symptomatic of underlying problem, serving a function, having utility	Identifying pathology, correct diagnosis, operating and excising pathology
3. Social sciences			
3a. Game theory	Serious game	Strategies, moves	Contest, countermoves, strategizing
3b. Drama	Living room drama	Roles, scripts, performances	Revising roles, selecting alternative dramatic form
3c. Ritual process	Rite of passage	Transition—separation, betwixt and between, re-incorporation	Mapping, drawing distinctions around status 1 and status 2
3d. Text	Behavioural text	Performance of oppressive, dominant story or knowledge	Opening space for the authoring of alternative stories

White and Epston then illustrate the significance of the distinctions between different analogies, and identify the effects of the interpretations arrived at through recourse to these analogies through a number of typical problems that psychologists encounter in their practice, from individual crisis to family dysfunction. In the latter category they refer to the example of couples seeking therapy because they encounter problems in their relationship, after an initial relatively enjoyable and mutually satisfactory phase of relationship, to show how differently both the “problem” and solutions can be understood. If this problem is understood through a biological analogy, the initial unproblematic phase can be defined as a “honeymoon phase”, implying that it represented an inaccurate reflection of the relationship, while the second, problematic phase will be assumed to reveal the true state of affairs, the state that was always present in a latent form, lurking beneath the surface. This problematic condition can in turn be interpreted as a reflection of still deeper processes of dysfunction and associated psychopathology, deeper processes that are, however, understood to have a status of objective reality or truth. Experts will then apply procedures and operations to identify these deeper levels of objective reality, tracing the history of the dysfunction and psychopathology, perhaps down through the family of origins of both parties, and into the relationships of their respective parents. “This is a typical construction of the form of depth psychology that so saturates western culture”, note White and Epston (1990: 8).

If the text analogy is employed, however, “then what the biological model constitutes as levels can be turned through 90° and stood on their ends, to be considered alternative and competing stories” (White and Epston 1990: 8—9). By abandoning a hermeneutic imperative in search of the deeper structures as necessarily embodying true meaning, the “surface” elements can be validated as equally important and significant—the couple is then free to choose that story they find most attractive for their life, which is, in White and Epston’s therapeutic experience, invariably the story of the first non-problematic phase. This story can then be examined for what it tells the partners about their resources, problem-solving abilities and resilience, empowering them to make this story the dominant one in the present and for their future. Thus, as White and Epston state:

[...] the text analogy advances the idea that the stories or narrative that persons live through determine their interaction and organization, and that the evolution of lives and relationships occurs through the performance of such stories or narratives. Thus, the text analogy is distinct from those analogies that would propose an underlying structure or pathology in families and persons that is constitutive or shaping of their lives and relationships. (White and Epston 1990: 12)

White and Epston thus question the very existence of the “outside of the text” as a separate “psychological reality” and reconceptualize such an outside as being a result of the work of stories themselves. Instead of aiming the vector of analysis at the supposed depth—and, by implication, the past—White and Epston remain on the textual surface; this surface, however, proves to be extraordinarily rich.

While the text analogy provides a frame that allows White and Epston to consider a broader socio-political context in which the storied lives unfold, as understood through the intertextual metaphor, it also enables them to include a consideration of power in its operation and effects on lives and relationships. White and Epston note that, “This possibility is an important one, as the vista of power has been much overlooked in therapy literature generally, and especially in the benign view that we frequently take of our own practice” (White and Epston 1990: 18). In their analysis of power and its multiple effects White and Epston are guided by Foucault’s analysis of the power/knowledge nexus discussed in Chap. 3.

White and Epston maintain that as we are all caught up in a system of power/knowledge and that it is not possible to cut ourselves apart from this domain, we are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation to others. However, they warn that this does not imply that all persons are equal in the exercise of power, nor that some do not suffer its subjugating effects more than others.

They further interrogate the notion of subjugated knowledge and the two classes of subjugated knowledge Foucault distinguished: “erudite” knowledge that has been “written out” through the ascendancy of a more global and unitary knowledge, and “local popular” or “indigenous” knowledge that is currently in circulation but is denied recognition and status. White and Epston then unpack and outline the profound methodological implications of this cluster of ideas for the psychological practices in general and in particular for the elaboration of narrative therapy:

In accepting Foucault’s analysis of the rise of global and unitary knowledge (that is, the objective reality scientific knowledges that make global and unitary truth claims), we become wary of situating our practices in those “truth” discourses of the professional disciplines, those discourses that propose and assert objective reality accounts of the human condition. And since it is the isolation of these knowledges from knowledges at large, as well as their establishment in the hierarchy of scientificity, that endows them with their power, we challenge the isolation of the knowledges of the professional disciplines from the field of discontinuous knowledges. In addition, we challenge the scientism of the human sciences. (White and Epston 1990: 28)

They maintain further that if it is accepted that power and knowledge are inseparable and that we are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising power over others, the benign view of psychological practices will fail to hold. For White, as for Foucault before him, narrative practices and in particular stories that are implicated in identity formation are embedded within broader historically-specific regimes of subjectification. White is acutely aware of the role that psychology and therapy play in the functioning of such regimes. Consequently, he is highly conscious both of the position of therapist and the use of a particular discourse in his practice: for White, who is careful not to use the term “client”, the therapist should enter into collaborative relationships with “people who consult him”. His vocabulary is in tune with his basic belief that the therapeutic situation should not replicate the conditions under which people are objectified through the labels of client, disturbed or sick. For White, assigning the position of an expert to the therapist and the position of an ill-informed bearer of the problem to his counterpart would replicate the imbalance of power that exists in a society. White insists that everyone is “knowledged” and that they have both resources and knowledge to deal with their predicaments.

White and Epston further urge the therapist to adopt a critical and self-reflexive position:

[W]e would assume that we are always participating simultaneously in domains of power and knowledge. Thus, we would endeavour to establish conditions that encourage us to critique our own practices formed in this domain. We would work to identify the context of ideas in which our practices are situated and explore the history of these ideas. This would enable us to identify more readily the effects, dangers, and limitations of these ideas and of our own practices. And, instead of believing that therapy does not have anything to do with social control, we would assume that this was always a strong possibility. Thus, we would work to identify and critique those aspects of our work that might relate to the techniques of social control. (White and Epston 1990: 29)

White and Epston’s methodology follows this imperative consistently. Even though they do not conduct research as such, and instead engage in therapeutic relationships, these relationships presuppose the production and utilization of certain forms of knowledge with regard to how efficiently therapeutic intervention could be organized and with regard to what can be communicated to the people who consult them. The knowledge that White and Epston obtain in the process of their practice is communicated back to the people they are working with in order to be utilized constructively by these people—to effect changes in their self-understanding and behaviour, to be incorporated within their conceptual and emotional frameworks—but also to be communicated to therapists and researchers.

Thus, we can distinguish two broad types of knowledge effectively used within White and Epston’s approach: the meta-knowledge about the procedures that encompass their practice; and the discursive formulations that they receive from people who consult them about their difficulties. Since White and Epston reject the interpretative imperative, the narratives that people who consult them share with them are acknowledged and addressed in therapy at face value, in a

mode that Bruner defined as “folk-psychology”: the way in which ordinary people talk about, reflect and construe “how people tick”. It is of critical significance for White and Epston that this knowledge should be received, preserved and utilized in its idiosyncratic formulation, the narrative constructed by each individual person. Therefore, the therapeutic procedures that they follow are described and formulated in such a way as to protect the singularity of the individually generated knowledge they are dealing with. These procedures therefore also concern the modes and directions of the interventions, without defining their content in advance. White defines such procedures as “maps of narrative practice” and describes them in the following way:

The maps that I review in this book are, like any maps, constructions that can be referred to for guidance on our journeys — in this case, on our journeys with the people who consult us about the predicaments and problems of their lives. Like other maps, they can be employed to assist us in finding our way to destinations that could not have been specified ahead of the journey, via routes that could not have been predetermined. And, like other maps, the maps that I present in this book contribute to an awareness of the diversity of avenues that are available to preferred destinations, avenues that can be charted and rendered familiar. I have formulated these maps over the years principally in response to requests from others to render more transparent the therapeutic processes that I have developed. I will emphasize here that the maps of this book are not *the* maps of narrative practice or a “true” and “correct” guide to narrative practice, whatever narrative practice is taken to be. (White 2007: 5)

Thus, White’s “maps” provide meta-level knowledge about therapy—knowledge about structure, but not the content, knowledge that is akin to generative grammar—producing new meanings as it unfolds and addressing the poetics but not the aesthetics of discourse.

On the metatheoretical, self-reflexive level, White and Epston’s methodology encompasses three aspects: separating from unitary knowledge; challenging the techniques of power; and resurrecting subjugated knowledge. In pursuing these three broad goals White and Epston make the narrative, textual and discursive construction of experiences that have been labelled problematic their main focus and primary instrument. Their programme of intervention begins with the step that they define as the “externalization of the problem”. In essence, externalization of the problem is aimed at making their discursive and narrative construction visible (Roth and Epston 1996a, b). It seeks to expose the way the language employed to describe a problem in effect shapes and maintains that problem by, on the one hand, legitimizing and naturalizing it and on the other by objectification, “thingification” and disempowering the client. In doing so, White and Epston acknowledge that their actions as therapists have performative and constructive power. Their first radical intervention is the refusal to accept the labelling of the person who consults them as problematic, sick or dysfunctional. Through externalization, the problem is constructed as an entity separate from the person, thus fundamentally disrupting the unifying signification typically and casually imposed by mainstream psychology. The externalization of the problem also entails the mapping of the problem’s influence in a person’s life and relationship and the examining of the demands that the problem makes on the person. For example, working through the problem presentation of self-hate, White does not ask such questions as, “Why do you hate yourself?” or “What makes you experience self-hate?”, which by their structure and content reinforce the identification between the person and the problem, but rather explores “what self-hate told the client about herself and what it required her to do to her body”, and then identifies “self-hate’s agenda for the client’s life, its attitude towards her, and its [the problem’s] ways of speaking” and proceeds to questioning the requirements of self-hate (White 2007: 56). As such, narrative therapy explores the influence of the problem on the individual’s life through the prism of the nexus of power and knowledge. From White and Epston’s point of view, it is through particular discursive practices that “problems” acquire power and compel people to treat themselves and others in a particular way. Power, therefore, is understood by White and Epston not only to be part of a larger socio-political context, but also to be located at the very core of problematic relationships.

Externalization of the problem allows them to move to the next phase in their therapeutic process: challenging the techniques of power. In this case, White and Epston address the effect of power

on an inter-individual level of operation, the power that the problem itself exerts over the person through its discursive formulation, defining it as “the requirements for the problem’s survival” (White and Epston 1990: 30). White and Epston’s aim in this stage is to explore the way in which the problem appears to compel persons to treat themselves and others in a certain way. White and Epston argue that it is always possible to find “unique outcomes” with regard to the oppressive work of any psychological problem. “Unique outcomes” represent moments when a person could have subjected him or herself or others to the techniques of power utilized by the problem but refused to do so. “Unique outcomes” thus demonstrate the resilience of the person and become a starting point for generating alternative stories, which represent the third phase of therapeutic intervention.

Identification of “unique outcomes” relies on mobilization of “thick description”, the methodological procedure that was inspired by Geertz’s work and poststructuralist critique of the dichotomy of deep structure versus surface manifestation more generally. As Colebrook (1997) demonstrates, the critical potential of the notion of “thick description” relates to its powerful anti-hermeneutic assumption: the rejection of explanation in favour of description. As Colebrook explains, “Through his concept of “thick description” Geertz suggests that a symbol or an action is not immediately coherent; but this is not because there is some deeper hidden meaning. Thickness is simply all that is presupposed by, and coexisting with, the exchange of a symbol” (Colebrook 1997: 74). As Colebrook further notes, “thick description” urges researchers to go beyond isolated observation of an event and acknowledge and incorporate in the description the heterogeneity and complexities coexistent with the event. “Thick description” does not begin with a general narrative but creates a number of dynamic narratives from particulars. “Thick description” as a method of cultural analysis implies a particular kind of understanding, which aims to avoid an imposition of general narrative and simultaneously tries to make visible those facets of experience that, although already present in the picture, are pushed into the background.

Making such facets of experience visible through thick description allows people to formulate alternative stories. Alternative stories begin to incorporate vital and previously neglected aspects of people’s lived experience, and thus challenge the “truths” that specify their lives and protest their subjugation to unitary knowledge. White and Epston note that in such a way local, popular or indigenous knowledges become available to be performed. Thus, their methodology binds the acknowledgement of the operation of the power/knowledge nexus with the emphasis on the performative mode of alternative knowledge generated through therapy:

Insofar as the desirable outcome of therapy is the generation of alternative stories that incorporate vital and previously neglected aspects of lived experience, and insofar as these stories incorporate alternative knowledges, it can be argued that the identification of and provision of the space for the performance of these knowledges is a central focus of the therapeutic endeavour. (White and Epston 1990: 31)

To this end, White and Epston developed a broad repertoire of specific therapeutic techniques, which they define not as “interventions” but as “conversations”, acknowledging their intention to build relationships with “people who come to consult them” as equals. These include “Re-Authoring Conversations”, “Re-Membering Conversations”, “Conversations that Highlight Unique Outcomes” and “Definitional Ceremonies”. The therapeutic effect in all of these techniques is derived from the constructive use of the potential of narrative—the potential to generate alternative stories and facilitate the articulation and performance of new meaning. While working predominantly in the oral mode, White and Epston also incorporate some techniques that rely on the written format in their therapy: these include the writing of letters and issuing “counter documents”. The letters, written by therapists or people who consult them, can be on the subject of redundancy (of the problem), prediction, counter-referral or reference, while “counter documents” can include certificates, declarations and self-certification.

To summarize: White and Epston’s approach strives to unpack the potential inherent in narrative by developing a broadly constructivist methodology. Careful attention to the discursive properties of narrative—from the point of view both of conceptual loading and of implementation of power

techniques—allows for its most productive use, turning it into an instrument of liberation from the tyranny of problems and the pressure of society.

## Conclusion

As the analysis in this chapter demonstrates, McAdams's, Hermans's, and White and Epston's methodological positions are significantly different. One way of accounting for these differences is provided by Murray's (2000) model of narrative analysis, comprised of four levels: personal, interpersonal, positional and ideological. The personal level of narrative analysis explores the individual, idiosyncratic and phenomenological, and encompasses the themes and structure of the main narrative in the person's life. On the interpersonal level, narrative is thought of in terms of a communication process and is concerned with its addressees—whether in the local research context or broader social interaction. On the positional level of analysis, the interpersonal is extended to include the differences in social positioning resulting from cultural and institutional prescriptions that shape and delimit the construction of personal identities. The ideological level is concerned with the effect of power on individuals' narratives and subjectivities. Adopting this frame of analysis, it can be seen that while McAdams's methodology addresses the personal level, Hermans's engages with personal, the interpersonal and positional levels. Only in White and Epston's work, however, are the challenges of the ideological level met squarely.

From another perspective, the differences between McAdams's, Hermans's, and White and Epston's methodological positions seem to confirm the distinction between the dominant modern epistemology of academic psychology and the postmodern epistemology of practice-based knowledge outlined by Polkinghorne:

The tacit assumptions of this epistemology of practice are: (a) there is no epistemological ground on which the indubitable truth of knowledge statements can be established; (b) a body of knowledge consists of fragments of understanding, not a system of logically integrated statements; (c) knowledge is a construction built out of cognitive schemes and embodied interactions with the environment; and (d) the test of a knowledge statement is its pragmatic usefulness in accomplishing a task, not its derivation from an approved set of methodological rules. (Polkinghorne 1992: 147)

While both McAdams's and Hermans's models have been developed primarily as explanatory paradigms corresponding to the requirements of scientific theory, Epston and White's narrative therapy was developed in response to the pressing practical issues that its authors encountered in the consulting room. While for McAdams and Hermans the criteria of solid methodology were validity, reproducibility, ability to generalize the findings, elimination of internal contradictions and greater explanatory power—all of which conform to the postulates of a modern epistemology—for White and Epston the criteria are shifted towards the overall usefulness of their practice (which encompasses a much more heterogeneous body of knowledge), emphasis on the singularity of occurrence of psychological events, the idiosyncratic fit between an intervention and presented problem and, overall, a recognition of the constructed character of knowledge.

Furthermore, the narrative methods elaborated by McAdams, Hermans, and White and Epston reveal the different ontological and epistemological assumptions of their underlying methodology. The specific ways of approaching narrative analysis proposed initially by Derek Edwards (1997) and developed further by Mary Horton-Salway (2001) can help to compare and contrast further the three methodologies under investigation. The first way is based on “a realist ontology” assumption, according to which narrative reflects an independent reality; the second way stresses the constructive role of a narrative's author; and the third way draws on a discursive approach where the self is not revealed through narrative, but produced performatively. As such, narrative becomes a social action embedded in a particular interactive context.

Such ways of approaching narrative thus form a continuum stretching from “a realist ontology” and essentialist epistemological assumptions towards a postmodern view in which “the social world is assumed to consist of multiple, fragmented, and conflicting realities and the ways of

seeing and knowing that construct them" (Goodbody and Burns 2011: 186). McAdams's, Hermans's, and White and Epston's methodologies can readily be positioned along such a continuum. While McAdams's can be aligned with a realist ontology, implying that narrative reflects the independent reality, Hermans's methodology can be located between the essentialist and relativist, sharing the view that narratives are cognitively constructed. White and Epston's work leans towards the relativistic, or postmodern, pole. As such, the three approaches under consideration in the present study demonstrate increasing diversification of methods in psychology as well as the growing tension between the search for new methodological paradigms and the commitment to the traditional positivistic assumptions of mainstream psychology.

Overall, this analysis raises the question of the possibility of the integration of diverse methodologies in narrative psychology. This issue is currently hotly debated, as demonstrated by the divergence in scholarly opinions about plurality of methods in narrative psychology. Two influential manuals on narrative methods exemplify such contrasting positions. On the one hand, Andrews et al. (2008: 3) argue against the integration of narrative approaches on the basis of their representing logically incommensurable positions due to "theoretical fault lines" and historical contradictions. Such contradictions stem from adopting either modern or postmodern epistemological and ontological perspectives, and treating first-person narratives either as a reflection of bounded, masterful, unitary identities or as social constructs, shaped by power relationships and critically implicated in the production of multiple, fluid subjectivities. They also emphasize the internal incommensurability in the current syntheses of the two positions, which often involve "maintenance of a humanist conception of a singular, unified subject, at the same time as the promotion of an idea of narrative as always multiple, socially constructed and constructing, reinterpreted and reinterpretable" (Andrews et al. 2008: 4).

On the other hand, Riessman, who describes narrative research methods as a family that is made up of various, sometimes conflicting, approaches, encourages the crossing of boundaries between methods and disciplines. Riessman points out, "Research in the human sciences has several recognized epistemologies and methodologies, and in narrative research there is added diversity" (Riessman 2008: 200). In this context, she argues that, "Narrative research can only grow stronger as we form connections across disciplinary boundaries, identify our own exemplars, build on them, and gain support and constructive criticism for our inquiries" (Riessman 2008: 200).

This call corresponds to a growing tendency in psychology more generally towards pluralism in qualitative research methods. Defined as the philosophical positions that argue against homogeneity and unity and that valorize diversity, pluralism emerged as a reaction against the dominance of mono-theoretical and mono-methodological paradigms (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). Over recent years, psychology has witnessed the proliferation and intensification of discussion of such methodological positions as "bricolage", mixed method models, multiple operationalism and triangulation (Denzin 1989a, b; Kincheloe 2001, 2005).

In its turn, the possibility of methodological pluralism raises a critical issue of the evaluation of truth claims, which by necessity brings in the consideration of the pivotal relationship between truth and ethics. As Parker argues, "the fact that we can relativise phenomena does not mean that all explanations or moral positions are equally valid or equally useless" (Parker 1997: 295). Kvale also highlights that "[t]he validity of psychological knowledge relates to the ethical value of this knowledge" (Kvale 1992: 52). The next chapter therefore addresses the issue of ethics in narrative theory and practice.

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## 5. NARRATIVE ETHICS

### Ethics and Academic Psychology

Despite the fact that the human being is at the centre of psychological inquiry and that the delineation of the conditions of a happy life is one of the leading concerns of psychology, the question of ethics occupies a peculiar position within contemporary academic psychology. Psychologists are guided by a code of ethics elaborated and legitimized by their profession, and most college degrees in psychology will include a course on ethical issues, the ethical issues raised by the practical aspects of conducting the business of psychotherapy, or developing the methodological procedures for experimental research. However, as Callender notes, at present, ethics in psychology is “rather like the ethics of medical practice i.e. something that informs practice in important ways, while remaining distinct from the actual procedures that are carried out” (Callender 2002: 184).

Under the aegis of ethics in psychology the following issues are typically considered: clients’ rights and confidentiality, professional responsibility and liabilities, dual relationships and conflict of interest in counselling, professional competence, training and licensing of psychologists as well as issues related to “special populations” such as women, children, the elderly, multicultural groups, and gay and lesbian clients (Corey et al. 1993; Pope and Vasquez 2007). Reflecting on this situation Adam Hill (2004) argues that three aspects of the conceptualization of professional ethics in practising psychology—decision-making models, principle ethics and the standard of care—need to be complemented by new models such as moral vision, narrative ethics, and virtue ethics.

Yet, the question of what narrative ethics might entail is not clear cut either. In her comprehensive engagement with narrative ethics leading to the publication of the edited collection *Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives* Ruthellen Josselson focuses on the ethical issues posed by the conduct of narrative research, exploring ethical implications of the process of asking people to share their stories as well as the after-effects of such revelations. For Josselson the central ethical dilemma in narrative research arises from the fact that the researcher has dual responsibility: to the people whom he or she engages in the research and to the scientific community. The challenge that emerges is then “How can we take an ethical position in regard to both our participants and our science at the same time?” (Josselson 1996: xii). While this is an important question that cuts across a number of specific narrative methods currently in use, as Josselson demonstrates, it leaves unexamined ethical assumptions within the foundational theoretical models that underpin these narrative methods.

As Stewart-Sicking points out, psychology inevitably entails a vision of the good life in its theories, and these have strong ethical implications in their understanding of human nature, health, change and helping. However, the challenge that any critical engagement with the ethical aspects of psychology faces is that “often these values are covered by a facade of scientific neutrality” (Stewart-Sicking 2008: 163). The ethical dimension of the very concept of the subject assumed by any particular movement in psychology attracts little analysis or reflection, despite the fact that these constructions can be argued to have crucial ethical implications.

In many important ways, however, these constructions of the subject resonate with the larger debates concerning the ethical issues that have informed philosophical developments throughout the twentieth century. In light of the critique of both the subject, as discussed in Chap. 3, and the community over the last 25 years, two guiding rationalities of the modern period—that centred on individual moral deliberation, and that on community commitment—are taken by some critics (MacIntyre, Taylor, Levinas, Gergen) no longer to be able to ground the ethical system. On the other hand, the decentring of the subject enacted by these critiques has itself posed a challenging task of engaging with the question of ethical agency “after” the subject (e.g. Nancy).

It is in this context that the distinct character and generative potential of narrative psychology becomes particularly clear. The analysis of concrete articulations of ethics within the three

streams of narrative psychology that are under consideration in the present study provides a way to grapple with the potential and limitations of such a narrative approach to ethics in its intersection with the real professional systems and practice.

### **Self as a Story: Plot, Temporality, Closure from an Ethical Point of View**

McAdams's take on ethics is most clearly revealed in his model of the redemptive self. As has been noted earlier, McAdams (2006) contends that it is a story of redemption that encompasses the lives of a substantial proportion of Americans at present. In doing so, McAdams pays significant attention to the moral and ethical aspects of the redemption narrative and draws on multiple sources to articulate his view. Among a variety of influences, ranging from popular culture and mass media to literary and historical sources, McAdams privileges the Biblical myth in particular, finding in it a ground to present Americans as a new chosen people. McAdams further positions this special intuitive understanding of role and purpose in life, shared on a national and individual level, as the source of striving to overcome, to be delivered and to be redeemed.

Referring to William James's treatise *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, McAdams argues that redemption can be found in all of the world's major religions and many cultural traditions, and defines it in a most general sense "as a deliverance from suffering to a better world. Religious conceptions of redemption imagine it as a divine intervention or sacred process, and the better world may mean heaven, a state of grace, or some other transcendent status" (McAdams 2006: 7). McAdams finds a "legion" of founding examples of stories that encode the sequence of early suffering followed by (promised or actual) deliverance to a better state in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. However, it is the first tradition that is particularly prominent in McAdams's argument, the tradition that includes the following powerful redemption sequences: "Abraham and Sarah suffer infertility into old age until God sends them Isaac, their son; the Israelites suffer through Egyptian captivity and 40 years of wandering until God delivers them to the Promised Land; Christ is crucified but raised up on the third day" (McAdams 2006: 19). McAdams traces a direct line from these Christian myths to contemporary American culture and the form of subjectivity it enshrines through such foundational instances of American history as the arrival of the Puritans on American soil and the establishing of the first communities, slavery and its abolition, and the adoption of the American constitution.

In the chapter entitled "Redemption and the American Soul" he writes: "By the time the first Puritan settlers set sail for the Massachusetts Bay in 1630, they already knew that America would be a land of redemption. On board the flagship *Arabella*, Governor John Winthrop urged his fellow colonists to bind themselves together into a loving community so that they might do God's redeeming work" (McAdams 2006: 24). Persecuted for their reformist beliefs in England, the Puritans perceived their journey as the journey to the New World, where they could escape their persecutors as the Israelites had escaped the Egyptians and found their Promised Land. In McAdams's summary, they felt like the whole Old World was watching as they embarked on their mission of utmost spiritual as well as political significance—"their city on the hill would serve as a model for all of Christendom [...] of a redemptive community made up of redemptive souls and working together to redeem the world" (McAdams 2006: 24).

Moreover, for McAdams the idea of redemption is inextricably connected to the notion of chosenness. As he suggests, the Puritans again established the historical precedent for this. Not only did they bring the idea of redemption that powerfully shaped the common psyche of Americans, they also grounded it in the feeling of exclusivity, the notion that they are, like the Israelites before them, the chosen people, with a special mission in the world. To confirm this, McAdams insists on the parallels between the Biblical account and the Puritans' myth: "a model for both collective and individual identity for the Massachusetts Bay settlers, the Puritan myth blended sacred narratives from Jewish and Christian traditions" (McAdams 2006: 103). McAdams further traces how the same idea became part of the founding narrative for the new republic. The hard-earned victory over the British was perceived as proof of God's blessing on

the new American republic. The new nation felt itself to be a light to the Old World, an inspiring model for democracy and freedom.

Although McAdams acknowledges that in the twentieth century Americans became increasingly ambivalent about their self-proclaimed status as the chosen people, “milder and more inclusive rhetoric of this kind still has the power to draw us in” (McAdams 2006: 105). What is more important for McAdams’s genealogy is that Americans’ sense of themselves as being the chosen people corresponds in important ways to the traditional American belief in individualism. Accordingly, McAdams concludes:

Americans have typically understood their destiny on two parallel levels, both of which may be traced back to the Puritan myth. On the collective level, we are part of a great enterprise, a people chosen for an exalted destiny, but on the individual level, each person is chosen too — called to a unique and special endeavor in life, *gifted* with an inner *specialness* that distinguishes him or her from every other person who has ever lived: I am chosen. (McAdams 2006: 109)

It is this feeling of exclusivity that is positioned at the beginning of the redemptive sequence by McAdams. This is the essential, “given” resource that allows the self to construe obstacles and misfortunes as tests, and grounds the conviction that they can be overcome and turned into good.

McAdams acknowledges that some aspects of his redemptive self model might have limitations: “For all its psychological and moral appeal, the redemptive self may reflect important shortcomings and blind spots in Americans” understandings of themselves and the world” (McAdams 2006: 25). The model raises moral and ethical issues that are not easy for the author to negotiate.

The implications of McAdams’s model for ethics, in particular his emphasis on the chosen people, can be challenged from a range of positions, such as poststructural and post-colonial critique as well as contemporary political philosophy. The exclusive category of chosen people conferred on the Americans by the redemptive self model appears to be deeply problematic in the light of the contemporary debates in continental philosophy. As influential political philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998) argues, the logic of exclusion/inclusion sets in motion dangerous dynamics not only in philosophy but also in politics and social developments, as has been amply demonstrated by the catastrophes of the twentieth century.

McAdams’s emphasis on the exclusivity of American identity can be juxtaposed with the post-colonial valorization of alterity, fragmentation, diversity and hybridity. Along these lines Gerald Prince (2005) argues for a post-colonial narratology that “is sensitive to matters commonly, if not uncontroversially, associated with the postcolonial (e.g., hybridity, migrancy, otherness, fragmentation, diversity, power relations); it envisages their possible narratological correspondents; and it incorporates them” (Prince 2005: 373). Along similar lines Marion Gymnich (2002) urges researchers to investigate how narrative texts construct, perpetuate or subvert concepts of identity and alterity or categories such as ethnicity, race, class and gender.

While McAdams tries to acknowledge in his historical analysis of the idea of redemption the role that this idea played for African-American slaves, he ignores the potentially irreconcilable differences in meanings for the white settlers and colonizers on the one hand and slaves on the other (while failing even to mention the possible resonance of that discourse for another major stream within the entity known as “American people”—namely, Native Americans). The narrative of redemption is presented by McAdams as such a powerful narrative for modern America precisely because in his view it seamlessly sutures the core conception of the “good” in various ethnic and social groups.

However, what appears at first sight to be an overgeneralization, from an ethical point of view represents the consequences of a particular treatment of the Other. It is the Other that should become exactly like the self in order to be considered as human, as equal, as partner. The white settler and the black slaves share the narrative of redemption—thus, by virtue of this shared belief they become equal; Native Americans, whose narrative can be encompassed by very different notions, are excluded from this discussion. Positioning the redemption story as the all-embracing

myth of modern-day America runs a risk of eradicating the difference and reducing the Other to the self—a move which is, according to Levinas, both ethically and politically problematic.

McAdams's theorizing of the issue of generativity sheds further light on the role of the Other in the ethical system encompassed by the narrative of redemption. The dialectic of chosenness and generativity in McAdams's model addresses and reflects “the universal tension” between individual self-expression and human belonging (McAdams 2006: 9). The blessing of some finds its counterpart in the suffering and disadvantage of other people. For McAdams, this stark contrast “sets up a moral challenge: Because I (the main character in the story) am advantaged in some way, I have the opportunity, or responsibility, to help improve the lives of those who might not be so blessed. I may even feel that I am *called* to do this, that it is my special fate or personal destiny to be of service to others” (McAdams 2006: 8). This call reaches its full fruition during the generative stage of life, proposed initially by Erikson in the model of adult development that McAdams followed. Generativity is the central psychological and moral challenge that adults face, especially in their thirties, forties and fifties. Adults who score highly on generativity—those who were blessed with the feeling of chosenness early in their life and successfully met the challenge of reconciling their strong need for power and independence with an equally strong need for love and community—will engage in promoting the well-being of future generations and leave a positive legacy of the self at this stage. The self, therefore, can engage in “giving back” to others only after it has succeeded in “looking after him/herself”. As such, “my” well-being always goes first; therefore, I need to become efficient in dealing with various life challenges before I can help others. In fact, my ability to help rests on this prior elaborated ability to take care of myself. The highly instrumental, pragmatic character of the self understood in such a way thus becomes obvious.

There are, however, other scenarios—scenarios in which redemption fails, and life takes the form of contaminated plots and vicious circles. According to McAdams's observations, this will typically happen to those who did not experience the feeling of chosenness early in their lives. Consequently, they become less able to construct their life along the lines of the redemptive narrative, suffer various defeats, develop psychological problems and become less generative. It is hard not to notice that the language and concepts utilized by McAdams to describe this dynamic become increasingly value-laden, judgemental and moralizing.

In order to assess the status of McAdams's position on ethics, it is worth considering the broader context of his theorizing. As has been noted before, McAdams's model of identity formation is rooted in Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which explicitly identifies virtues that are to be developed at each stage of life: hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, wisdom. Erikson's model has recently generated renewed attention in the context of the emergence in the late 1990s of *positive psychology*—a field in psychology that strives to refocus the attention of scholars from their traditional engagement with negative symptoms and adverse circumstances of psychological functioning, onto the positive aspects of psychology.

The domain of positive psychology encompasses three levels: at the subjective level, it addresses positive experiences such as well-being, optimism and flow. At the individual level, it engages with character strengths—the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, and high talent. At the group level it interrogates the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals towards better citizenship: responsibility, parenting, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethics. The key advocates of positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 5), maintain that “the social and behavioral sciences [...] can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound while being understandable and attractive. They can show what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities”. McAdams and his colleagues have strongly supported this move and, in their contribution to *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*, argued for closer collaboration between their programme of research and positive psychology (McAdams et al. 2009).

However, the ethical position of positive psychology is not unproblematic, as Mike Martin (2007) has demonstrated in his critical analysis. Martin points out that there is an internal contradiction at the core of the movement: while positive psychologists claim value neutrality, they seem to endorse normative ethics. Martin argues that positive psychology engages in the activity of normative ethics to the extent that it shares a eudemonic concept of ethics, which identifies the state of happiness with the acquisition of virtue. By endorsing a eudemonic conception of ethics, positive psychology can no longer consider itself merely a descriptive and predictive science, but should acknowledge that it is also engaged in the activity of prescriptive valuation.

Such criticism can be extended to McAdams's model. Indeed, addressing the issue of narrative identity and eudemonic well-being, Bauer, McAdams and Pals express the view that complex narrative identity is closely tied to the subjective interpretation of oneself as happy. This view is based on the adoption of a eudemonic view of well-being that, in addition to the sense of having pleasure and meaning in one's life as measured by self-reported well-being, also includes higher degrees of psychosocial integration in that meaning is measured as ego-development. These higher degrees of psychosocial integration correspond to the complex narrative identity encompassed in the notion of personal growth, a tendency to frame difficult life events as transformative, and the adoption of the narrative of redemption in describing the move from suffering to an enhanced state of being (Bauer et al. 2006).

Thus, McAdams's model of identity as life story relies on an ethical system formulated in terms of substantive moral principles, identified in terms of their distinctively moral content, concrete values and virtue as duty. McAdams's implied ethical system reinstates as normative a number of foundational principles and virtues originating in Christianity and widely referenced in literature and mass culture. The idea that the road to salvation goes through suffering, the concept of individual calling, and the underlying notion of strong moral convictions put to the test through life can be read as an attempt to rework a Protestant ethic for the twenty-first century.

### **The Dialogical Self: Between Polyphony and Power**

While for McAdams the event of September 11, 2001, and the ethical, moral and political issues that were raised in its wake have served as a catalyst for his model of the redemptive self, giving a dominant voice to a particular stream within the collective American psyche, in this context the proponents of the dialogical self made a strong argument for the heightened relevance of the polyvocal self that is open to internal and external interchanges. In the recent book *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* Hubert Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka have provided persuasive reasons why the processes of globalization and localization, the central driving forces within the world's political, ideological and cultural dynamics, would require a dialogical conceptualization of self and identity, "one that can account for the different and even opposing demands" resulting from these processes (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 22).

*Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* drew on the ideas expressed earlier by Hermans and Dimaggio when they stressed the relevance of the dialogical model in the context of uncertainty resulting from growing globalization and the parallel processes of intensified localization:

[G]lobalization is not to be equated with homogenization or uniformity but finds localization as its counterforce. Whereas globalization challenges people to extend their selves and identities beyond the reach of traditional structures, this extension implies the pervasive experience of uncertainty. Intensification of this experience motivates individuals and groups to maintain, defend, and even expand their local values and practices by establishing a niche for the formation of a stable identity. (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 40)

The pivotal role accorded in this model to the experience of uncertainty is indicative of the broader socio-political focus that Hermans articulates in his research, which differentiates his work from

the more narrow traditional view of academic psychology. While anxiety has been at the forefront of psychological inquiry for as long as psychology has been operating as a science, it was approached as naturally given or developing within the circumscribed world of an individual's family—either as a result of early childhood emotional experiences (psychoanalysis) or as a result of the formation of maladaptive beliefs in the immediate social environment (cognitive-behaviour approach). Hermans's understanding of anxiety as uncertainty, conceptualized within a broad social and political landscape, is radically different and falls in line with the recent scholarly interest in the cultural history of emotion evident in sociology and anthropology.<sup>1</sup>

Addressing uncertainty as a phenomenon of the twenty-first century globalized world, Hermans differentiates four aspects within this experience:

(a) *complexity*, referring to a great number of parts that have a large variety of relations; (b) *ambiguity*, referring to a suspension of clarity, as the meaning of one part is determined by the flux and variation of the other parts; (c) *deficit knowledge*, referring to the absence of a superordinate knowledge structure that can resolve the contradictions between the parts; and (d) *unpredictability*, implying a lack of control of future developments. [...] the experience of uncertainty characterizes a global situation of multivoicedness (complexity) that does not allow a fixation of meaning (ambiguity), that has no superordinate voice for resolving contradictions and conflicting information (deficit knowledge), and that is to a large extent unpredictable. (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 40)

Hermans and his colleagues outline three reasons why global—local connections require a dialogical conception of self and identity, namely “The increasing multiplicity of self and identity, the need for developing a dialogical capacity and the necessity of acknowledging the alterity of the other person with whom one enters into a dialogical contact” (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 40). They further suggest that, with increased globalization, individuals and groups cannot be located within one particular culture, internally homogeneous and distinctly differentiated from other cultures. Instead, people are living in the context of cultural interface. The increasing interrelatedness of nations and cultures not only involves inter-individual relationships but is also reflected and paralleled on the intra-individual level. The self of an individual person provides a locus for different cultures to come together and meet. Thus, the global—local nexus has become incorporated within the individual as a constituent of a dialogical self in action.

In contrast to earlier closed and homogeneous societies, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka note, cultural differences, contrasts and oppositions are prominent in the globalized society of today. Various cultural practices, worldviews and ideologies reveal their fundamental differences and enter into seemingly irreconcilable struggles. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka thus suggest that “when the world becomes more heterogeneous and multiple, the self, as part of this world, also becomes heterogeneous and multiple” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 30). This argument resonates closely with Hermans and Dimaggio's conviction that, “fundamental differences in an intensely interconnected world society not only require dialogical relationships between people to create a liveable world but also a self that has developed the capacity to deal with its own differences, contracts, tensions, and uncertainties” (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 10).

It is of critical importance, Hermans emphasizes, that such dialogical relationships be able to recognize and respond to the difference of the position of groups or other persons—that is, to recognize the perspective of the other party in order to re-examine its initial standpoints in light of the interaction with the other. Such differences, however, are not absolute and can be resolved and overcome with time.

While anchoring his dialogical model of self in Bakhtin's work, Hermans and his colleagues nevertheless take a decisive turn from the Bakhtinian position in developing an “operationalized” model of dialogue, power and dominance, as has been discussed in the previous chapters. This move has particularly far-reaching implications for ethics. Hermans argues that the understanding of dialogue as an interaction among perfectly equal partners can be regarded as no more than a “romantic ideal” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 38).

Defining dialogue as “a well organized turn-taking process”, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka insist that “[r]elative dominance is not extrinsic but rather intrinsic to the dialogical process” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 38). For Hermans, the participants in dialogical interactions have to continually alternate the roles of “power holder” and “power subject”.

This move requires close attention as much more is at stake here than a change of the rhetorical register from the notions of recognition of absolute alterity to the algorithm of turn-taking, which is dictated by the need to “operationalize” the philosophical notion of dialogue for psychological use. It can be argued that it is in fact the substitution of one ethical position by another: from the ethics of answerability and responsibility inherent in dialogue, as defined by Bakhtin, we are moving to the ethics of power and control, power that deeply penetrates social interactions and intra-individual dynamics. Hermans illustrates his model of dialogue by referring to the role social dominance and institutions play in the practices of “question and answer” and relationships of agreement and disagreement. Hermans observes that the freedom to ask questions of each other in a conversation depends on the “difference in dominance between parties” and that, in a similar way, “relationships of agreement or disagreement are organized on the basis of institutional positions” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 39). While it is hard to dispute such an observation regarding the social context of many interactions, the critical question remains where to go from there. While for such thinkers as MacIntyre and Bauman, as we shall see later on, such an observation becomes a point of departure for critique for a postmodern ethics, for Hermans, even though with some qualifications, this point becomes a foundational given, which not only directs social practice but also organizes the internal structure of the self.

As noted earlier, Hermans approaches the self as a fundamentally social phenomenon, where concepts, images and understandings are deeply determined by the relations of power. From this position, Hermans conceptualizes the self as incorporating within its structure the division between internal and external domains, containing such entities as subject, object and abject (that Hermans defines, following Julia Kristeva, as an unconscious part of the self representing an “enemy”) (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 42). The self is characterized by the “position repertoire” with which individuals, as agentic subjects, do or do not identify themselves at any given moment. These positions within the self are imbued with various degrees of power reflecting the power relationships in the social world, and can be regulated by such principles as “belonging to myself” and “not belonging to myself” and distinctions between “superior” and “inferior”.

With regards to the challenges and dynamics of globalization, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka note that while on the one hand the boundaries between the external and internal domains of self have become increasingly permeable, on the other, positions that correspond to one’s own national, religious or ethnic group are often construed as representing purity, order, truth, beauty, good and right, whereas those on the outside are seen as affected by pollution, falsity, ugliness, badness and wrong. For Hermans and Hermans-Konopka such a dynamics represents a logical and unavoidable result of balancing biological needs for stability, safety and security, and the fluidity in the social world ushered in by globalization:

At the interface of the social and the biological, we witness a paradoxical situation: whereas globalization has the potential to increase the density and heterogeneity of positions of the self in unprecedented ways, it evokes, at the same time, forms of localization that are driven by deeply rooted biological needs that cause a serious reduction and restriction of positions in the repertoire of the self. (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 50)

Clearly, in the current political context, Hermans’s interpretation of certain social processes from a dialogical perspective represents a constructive step forward:

From a dialogical point of view, religious orthodoxy, the rise of fundamental movements, and the phenomenon of patriotism find their expression in collective voices that encourage a hierarchical organization of the position repertoire of the self and a reduction of the heterogeneity of positions with a simultaneous avoidance of internal disagreement, conflict, and uncertainty. The dominance of one voice or a few voices over the others leads to a reduction of the experience of uncertainty,

but at the same time, it has the questionable effect that other voices, as possible contributors or innovators of the self, are silenced or split off. (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 57)

From this point of view, McAdams's model can be seen as precisely an attempt to limit and control anxiety in the increasingly unpredictable political landscape post-September 11 through the recourse to patriotism and religious orthodoxy. While not discussing McAdams's intervention, Hermans does refer to Kinwall (2004), who noted that global changes intensified "ontological insecurity" and "existential uncertainty", producing institutionalized religion and nationalism as identity markers in times of rapid change and an uncertain future.

The critical question, however, is how far Hermans is prepared to take the dialogical position he advocates and how exactly he unpacks its ethical implications. It is here that some tensions appear in Hermans's theorizing, tensions produced by the increasing limitations imposed on the notion of dialogue in the process of developing its "applied" definition. Initially, Hermans acknowledged the potential open-endedness of dialogue, arguing that, in principle, dialogical relationships are open and move towards an unknown future. However, he later questioned the truth of Bakhtin's claims by referring to common-sense logic and everyday observations.

Hermans concludes that in real life, contrary to Bakhtinian theory, dialogue bears more resemblance to confrontation and defensive interaction:

The fact that people exchange opinions in a conversation is no guarantee of an open dialogue. In case of disagreement, they defend their point of view against the opinion of the other, and in case of agreement, they use the opinion of the other party as a means to further corroborate or even expand their initial viewpoint. In a globalizing environment, people are confronted with myriad opinions and ideologies that are different from those that they have learned in their local environments. When these views are experienced as threatening or undermining their local point of view, they are motivated to defend their local positions, often in emotional ways. Self-defense restricts the dialogical self. (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 57)

What becomes apparent here is that the logic of dialogue cannot be combined with the logic of power and dominance, the dichotomies of outside and inside, self and enemy. The logic of dialogue carries within itself the impetus of another ethical system, a system that insists on thinking outside these categories. If this potential is not acknowledged then there indeed appears to be a gap in the ethical system, a gap that Hermans strives to fill by the incorporation into his system of what he calls "emotion work" and "emotion rules": "Emotion work takes place under the guidance of emotion rules. Such rules are standards used in internal and external dialogues to determine what it is right or wrong to feel. Emotion rules serve as standards that tell us what is "due" in a particular social or personal position" (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 59). Hermans analyses emotional positions in terms of privileges, restrictions, obligations and entrance requirements:

There is a privilege when, for example, a person in love may engage in sexual behavior that otherwise may be viewed as socially inappropriate. Restrictions refer to limits on what a person can do when acting under emotion. For example, lovers are expected to be discrete and honorable in their affairs. Whereas restrictions forbid a person to feel and do particular things, obligations instruct the person what should be felt or done. For example, in all societies those who are bereaved are expected to perform particular mourning practices. An individual who fails to comply with these expectations is often subject to severe sanction. Finally, most social positions have entry requirements, that is, they can be occupied only by persons of a certain age, sex, training, or social status. (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007: 59)

As this passage amply demonstrates, what Hermans defines as "emotion rules" correspond to ethical norms and moral prescriptions, and moreover, to a particular system that is itself historically constructed. Thus, it can be argued that Hermans's essentialist understanding of emotion represents an incorporation of a normative substantive ethical system in which overtones of Enlightenment discourse, Kantian reasoning and Protestant ethics are clearly discernible.

The introduction of “emotion rules” as an ethical foundation doesn’t agree easily with the Bakhtinian paradigm. Bakhtin explicitly opposes the grounding of ethics in empathy. But Hermans’s emphasis on power in this context appears to be even more problematic. It can be argued that dialogue and power make rather incompatible theoretical partners. While dialogue presupposes differences and is organically linked with the notion of multivoiced polyphony, power (at least as it came to be understood in the modern period) is closely associated with a univocal position, which by definition excludes all differences.

The recourse to power and dominance is predicated on Hermans’s earlier reduction of alterity to difference. The critical distinction here relates to alterity as an irreducible singularity that cannot be appropriated, while difference, with time and effort, can be understood, and therefore appropriated. For Hermans, alterity is not an irreducible given, as it is for Bakhtin, but a temporary and unfortunate state that can be overcome. But absolute alterity is structurally and philosophically essential for Bakhtin’s system and its implications for ethics: it is only against alterity and unpredictability that choice, decision and freedom can occur; it is only the presence of that irreducible other that calls for answerability on my side, and it is only in this context that human actions become truly responsible (Bakhtin 1993). The core of Bakhtinian theorizing encapsulated in the principle of dialogism, of polyphony and multivoicedness understood as clash and constant refraction of consciousness through each other, becomes increasingly limited as Hermans’s model acquires psychological sophistication. From a Bakhtinian perspective, such a loss is a critical one as this is the very core that allows Bakhtin to ground freedom in his model.

It can thus be concluded that in many important ways Hermans departs from Bakhtinian insights and resorts to a less ambitious position. It seems that such a stand is to some degree a reaction to the pressure to generalize, to come up with rules, norms and principles applicable to large groups of people, to operate on a broader than case-by-case basis—the pressure of the positivist-orientated model of science that psychology shares. The question then arises as to whether the new ethics, based on the principles of dialogue and respecting irreducible singularity and alterity, can be implemented in psychology at all. It should thus come as no surprise that the greatest advance in this direction so far has been made by narrative therapy—the mode of psychological practice that, by definition, addresses individual subjects.

## **The Ethics of Narrative Therapy**

The focus of Michael White’s *Maps of Narrative Practice* has a particular added significance in the context of discussing the ethical aspects of the narrative approach in psychology. Narrative therapy is a system that departs most deliberately and radically from a normative definition of the subject, theoretical assumptions about psychic nature and rules, norms and standards that could, by implication, define an ethical position. Rejecting diagnostic categories and symptomatic labelling of clients, narrative therapy is grounded in people’s unique and individual stories and unfolds as a conversation between two equal partners, a therapist and a person who consults him or her, in the process of which stories can change. As such, it would appear that narrative therapy operates on a groundless terrain, a terrain that must be mapped every time a therapist enters into contact with a client. It is from within this groundlessness, however, that the most articulate and advanced commitment to and the most systematic realization of the potential inherent in the narrative approach with regards to ethics emerges.

Contrary to McAdams’s approach, which as discussed earlier is at risk of reducing the variety of personal stories to one underlying myth, White works towards “amplifying” the uniqueness of narrated personal experience. If McAdams looks for the general, White is searching for the particular. If McAdams circumscribes the individual within the common, White is committed to the irreducible singularity of the story. The principal therapeutic tool used to achieve this in narrative therapy, as discussed previously, is a “thick description” through which more detailed, nuanced and specific accounts emerge. However, in the context of narrative therapy, “thick description” has ethical implications: it works against totalizing conceptualization. White defines

“totalizing” descriptions as encompassing both unidirectional and negative characteristics of the conceptualization of experience:

This totalizing of the problem is founded upon the dualistic, either/or habits of thought that have become quite pervasive in Western culture, and it can require special effort on behalf of therapists to remain conscious of such thinking, and its associated hazards. This consciousness is important because totalizing can obscure the broader context of the problems that people bring to therapy and can invalidate what people give value to and what might be sustaining. (White 2007: 35)

White insists that on the contrary, what needs to be achieved from the very beginning of the therapeutic engagement is a particular “experience-near” definition of the problem. The predicaments for which people seek therapy should be richly characterized, and through this characterization “experience-distant” and “global” definitions should be rendered “experience-near” and “particular”:

An “experience-near” description of the problem is one that uses the parlance of the people seeking therapy and that is based on their understanding of life (developed in the culture of their family or community and influenced by their immediate history). In using the word *particular*, I am acknowledging the fact that no problem or predicament is perceived or received in identical ways by different people, or in identical ways at different times in a person’s life. No predicament or problem is a direct replica of any other predicament or problem, and no predicament or problem of the present is a carbon copy of the predicament or problem it was in the past. (White 2007: 40)

As discussed earlier, narrative therapeutic intervention moves from a “thick description” of the problem to the identification of “unique outcomes” or exceptions. The insistence on the identification of unique outcomes as a major resource reveals the extent of White’s commitment to the singularity of people’s experience.

White explicitly rejects an evaluative or expert position on the side of the therapist—the therapist’s engagement is not about making judgements, giving opinions or advice, or theorizing, but this does not mean that he undermines the ethical dimension of therapy. This ethical dimension, however, is not informed by substantive principles, norms or rules; rather, it resonates with the notion of quest, as introduced by MacIntyre. As a conversational partner, a therapist is able to ask questions that promote and expand a rich understanding of the lived experience of the client, including his or her basis for making particular value judgements. This is achieved through the use of a particular type of “why” questions. Against the “bad publicity” that “why” questions have received in counselling and the fields of psychotherapy, White defends their usefulness, and in fact, their necessity:

These “why” questions play a profoundly significant role in helping people to give voice to and further develop important conceptions of living, including their intentional understanding about life (for example, understanding their purposes, aspirations, goals, quests, and commitments), their understanding about what they value in life, their knowledge about life and life skills, and their prized learnings and realizations. (White 2007: 49)

Narrative therapy, in White’s view, therefore encompasses two dimensions: the questioning of dominant stories in people’s lives and questioning of the basis of value on which they form their decisions regarding what is “good” for them, and thus the questioning of the notion of “good” itself.

Another feature of White’s use of the concept of narrative that has important implications for ethics is his insistence on the open-ended and provisional character of life stories. Any dominant story is always complemented by alternative ones, and even when they become dominant they remain open to revision. Experience can be narrated, but it should remain unfinalizable, vis-à-vis the unfolding life of a person, open to new challenges and choices. Narrative is a means that people utilize to formulate what is good for them in life and also to achieve a greater agentic control of their lives, but they are not ends in themselves, storied definitions of self or identity. Unpredictability is accorded a significant position in anyone’s life development and provision is thus made for this in therapy: stories that people construct remain utterly unpredictable for the

therapist. For White, it is only from this position that therapy can contribute to the “foundations of new possibilities in people’s lives” (White 2007: 261).

It is of critical importance that the therapist is positioned as a collaborative partner and not as an expert or a sympathetic friend. It is equally unproductive and, from an ethical point of view, questionable either to theorize the experience narrated by the client or to move to a position of empathy, as has been advocated by many psychological approaches, perhaps most famously by humanistic psychology. For White, as for Bakhtin before him, neither theorization nor empathy promote dialogical conversation, conversation that can only take place when there is a commitment to the multivoicedness of communication.

Moreover, the one-to-one interaction in narrative practice is typically complemented by the engagement of the broader community members. White describes such engagement as definitional ceremonies. Drawing on the work of anthropologist and filmmaker Barbara Myerhoff with elderly displaced Jewish communities, White developed rituals for engaging “outsider-witnesses” in narrative therapeutic practice. These witnesses facilitate therapy by allowing people who consult a therapist to reappear on their own terms in the eyes of community members, experience an acknowledgement of the identity claims expressed in their stories, and experience the authentication of these identity claims—in the words of Myerhoff, “garnering witnesses to one’s worth, vitality, and being” (Myerhoff quoted in White 2007: 183—184).

Epston recalls that the notion of witnessing became increasingly important for White in the latest stages of his work, precisely in terms of its ethical implications. Epston refers to White’s intense engagement with the writing of Nancy Scheper-Hughes, an anthropologist who insisted on the primacy of the ethical dimension in anthropological inquiry. Quoting Scheper-Hughes’s paper at length, Epston changes the author’s term “anthropologist” to “therapist”, as in his view Scheper-Hughes’s lines perfectly summarize his understanding of the ethical position of narrative practice:

The therapist [formerly anthropologist] can view her subjects as unspeakably other, belonging to another time, another world altogether. If it is to be in the nature of an ethical project, the work of therapy [anthropology] requires a different set of relationships. In minimalist terms, this might be described as the difference between the therapist [anthropologist] as “spectator” and the therapist [anthropologist] as “witness”.

If observation links the therapist [anthropologist] to the natural sciences, “witnessing” links therapy [anthropology] to moral philosophy. Observation, the therapist [anthropologist] as “fearless spectator”, is a passive act which positions the therapist [anthropologist] above and outside human events as a “neutral” and “objective” [i.e. uncommitted] seeing I/eye. Witnessing, the therapist [anthropologist] as *companheira*, is the active voice, and it positions the therapist [anthropologist] inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will “take sides” and make judgments, though this flies in the face of therapeutic [anthropological] non-engagement with either ethics or politics. Of course, non-involvement was, in itself, an “ethical” and moral position.<sup>2</sup>

Just as a client remains the Other for the therapist, the therapist remains the Other for the client, responding to him from his unique—and engaged—position. White further characterizes this position of a therapist as decentred, implying that it is the client who in many important ways “leads” the therapy. However, this is not equivalent to a free-floating process—the therapist is endowed with power and responsibility, and a significant part of this responsibility relates precisely to the understanding of the role that power plays in the therapeutic relationship and the world at large outside the therapeutic room. However, White’s understanding of power differs substantially from Hermans’s emphasis on power as dominance that determines social relationships and the structure of the self.

As has been discussed earlier, White’s understanding of power is derived from the works of Foucault and particularly emphasizes the “positive” or constitutive aspect of power. Unlike “negative” power that is “repressive in its operations and its effects”, and “principally disqualifies, limits, denies, and contains”, “positive” power is “constitutive or shaping of persons” lives”. Following Foucault, White acknowledges that through “positive” power persons are subject to

normalizing “truths” that shape their lives and relationships. White refers to the following passage from *Discipline and Punish*:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms; it “excludes”, it “represses”, it “censors”, it “abstracts”, it “masks”, it “conceals”. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domain of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained from him belong to this production. (Foucault 1979: 194)

For White, the constitutive character of power, which implies a potential for resistance at every point where power is applied, is of crucial importance as it is at this juncture that White locates the most important resource of therapy. White defines narrative practice as “counter-practices to cultural practices that are objectifying of persons and their bodies”. The critical importance of these practices lies in the fact that “[t]hese counter-practices open space for persons to re-author or constitute themselves, each other, and their relationships, according to alternative stories or knowledge” (White and Epston 1990: 75). In this way, according to White, narrative means can lead to therapeutic and liberating ends.

White’s framework, incorporating narrative principles alongside a Foucauldian definition of the power/knowledge nexus, can be seen as problematic in terms of its implications for ethics, however. Such prominent proponents of the narrative paradigm as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre have expressed concerns about the “destructiveness” of Foucault’s thought with regards to the notion of moral order. On the other hand, Réal Fillion (2005) defends the logic and specificity of Foucault’s ethical stand. Fillion shows how Foucault’s appeal to Greek ethical practices was driven by the latter’s concern “with living one’s life as one’s own”, implying the need “to be ethical without appealing to a moral order” (Fillion 2005: 56). Foucault’s model of ethics implies an individual’s shaping of his or her life in an aesthetic way, in a sense of giving it a shape comparable to a work of art. As Fillion explains: “The ethical self, as opposed to the moral self, needs to work on itself not in order to counter something [...] but in order to give that self a kind of shape that, recognized as admirable or worthy, can then truly be called one’s own (in the sense of being distinct from others)” (Fillion 2005: 56). And if in modernity, as Fillion notes, this process takes place inside a normative space within which institutions and practices are self-imposed, Foucault also allows us to envisage the permanent possibility of contestation of the effective limits that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as agentic subjects of our thoughts and deeds, through the very process of self-actualization in those events. As Fillion further explains, “Ethics in such a context consists of facing or “living-up” to that which in those configurations allows us to be self-critical (i.e., mature) and to foster such an ethos of self-critique that for Foucault consists in “a critique of what we are saying, thinking, and doing, through a historical ontology of ourselves” (Fillion 2005: 59—60).

The point of Foucault’s intervention, Fillion highlights, is to loosen the hold that our discursive regimes have upon us sufficiently to enable us to examine their necessities in specific, historically determinable circumstances. Fillion concludes that Foucault’s work decisively places the possibility of free action at the heart of ethics and helps us to recognize and test this possibility in more than theoretical terms.

Foucault’s legacy has been taken up by professionals in various practices—educators, social workers, health-care workers, activists—who, in dealing with institutional “necessities” that confront them, are enabled by Foucault’s approach to see the possibilities for free action that nevertheless remain open. White’s narrative practice certainly belongs to this tradition. Within this broad commitment, what has uniquely characterized White’s approach as a therapist and theoretician has been his attendance to what David Denborough (2009) defines as a “politics of experience”. Denborough writes:

[T]ime and again we witnessed Michael working in ways to resurrect subjugated knowledges, and to provide possibilities to those whose identities had been marginalised to “reclaim their stories and reclaim their lives”. Michael’s dedication to question the power of professionals and deconstruct expert knowledge shone through. [...] Within Michael’s work there was an

attendance to the politics of experience that, to me, is one of his most profound legacies. (Denborough 2009: 96)

Overall, narrative practice as elaborated by White, Epston and their followers is fundamentally concerned with using narrative for liberation, understood both in terms of political liberation, as liberation from the oppressive effects of power, and in the therapeutic dimension, as liberation from the tyranny of problems and predicaments that people face, where the former and the latter are intertwined in a complex, overdetermined way. The growth of narrative practice around the globe, and the success of this approach in dealing with issues in varied situations—from community work with aboriginal people to documenting testimonies of trauma of the survivors of genocide in Rwanda, from the victims of bushfire in Australia to the victims of torture in South Africa, from people diagnosed with mental illness to “difficult” children and teenagers—demonstrates that therapy anchored in the principle of the unique, irreducible specificity of personal narrative can become a powerful force in the twenty-first century. However, to take the ethical potential of narrative approach to its sustained realization, it must engage in a broader dialogue with philosophy, especially with those developments that directly address the relationships between narrative, dialogue and ethics.

### **Conclusion: From Ethical Practice to the Practice of Ethics**

While McAdams’s and Hermans’s approaches to the relationship between ethics and narrative differ considerably, they both rely on general normative principles that are located externally and, as such, separate from narrative processes involved in constructing the sense of identity and self.

Yet, contemporary debates on philosophy and ethics suggest the possibility of a more radical implementation of an ethical approach grounded in narrative itself, such as the ethics sensitive to temporality emphasized by Ricœur, the ethics based on continuous evaluation and re-evaluation as proposed by Taylor, the notion of quest introduced by MacIntyre, and finally the ethics grounded in singularity and the Other as suggested by Bakhtin and Levinas—the models that are occasionally mentioned in relation to narrative psychology but not utilized fully. Such models make possible a departure from definitive pre-outlined ethics brought from without, towards articulating the ethics from within—as a vector of an autopoietic unfolding of life encompassing the very logic of narrative development.

Claire Colebrook argues that from a narrative perspective ethics is inextricably linked with the pursuit of meaning through an autopoietic (self making) unfolding of life:

[H]uman life makes sense of itself, gives form to itself and engages in a style of praxis whereby its ends are internal to itself. From this image of life one thereby passes to an ethics. There ought to be no *techne* that is disengaged from life, and life’s proper *techne* — the art of life — is nothing other than making meaning of, or narrating of, one’s life. Literature would, therefore, not be one praxis among others that is added on to life. Rather, life in all its forms is self-creation, while human life renders this self-creation explicit to itself through narrative; human life is that one praxis that discloses the logic of praxis in general. (Colebrook 2006)

Such an understanding encompasses Ricœur’s engagement with the question of narrative identity that places “narrativity on the broader trajectory of an anthropology of human action and, more precisely, at the point where the theory of action and ethical theory are joined” (Kemp 1995: 375). In *Oneself as Another* Ricœur unpacks the ethical implications of narrative, which, as he puts it, “mainly concern the fact that the capacity of the moral subject to impute his own actions to himself is based on his capacity to assume narratively the story of his own life”, and suggests that there is thus no “break between the narrative component and the ethical component of the self” (Ricœur 1995: 397). These considerations demonstrate that the process of narrative is inextricably bound up with ethics, and narrative psychology thus has an ethical basis.

Ethics and narrative have been linked even more strongly by Charles Taylor (1989: 47), who argues that:

[...] in order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good, which means some sense of qualitative discrimination, of the incomparably higher. [...] this sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story. But this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*.

There are certain significant parallels between Taylor's articulation of the link between narrative and identity and McAdams's model of identity as a life story: both argue for the importance of coherent narrative as a foundation of identity. There are, however, some differences as well. It appears that for McAdams the narrative unfolding of life can take place *separately* from the ethical dimension, which is brought from outside as a prescriptive moral system that contains a definition of what is good—for example, as in the myth of redemption. For Taylor, the ethical dimension is always already present in the narrative rendering of life experience, as it can only take place in relation to a certain understanding of the good. Taylor provides a broader framework for McAdams's model of life story, enriching the possibility of the latter for engagement with the whole range of unpredictable life scenarios and explicating their ethical orientation and potential. Within this framework two processes would be addressed simultaneously: the plotting of one's own life, and continuous re-evaluation of the actual events of one's life vis-à-vis a continuous re-examination of the notion of the good.

An emphasis on the re-examination of the notion of the good life also marks MacIntyre's powerful engagement with ethics and narrativity. In his work MacIntyre (1981) turns to Aristotelian as opposed to Kantian ethics and suggests addressing ethics not through substantive conceptions of the *good life* but through the notion of the narratability of a *consistent life*:

In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask "What is the good for me?" is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask "What is the good for man?" is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common. But now it is important to emphasize that it is the systematic asking of these two questions and the attempt to answer them in deed as well as in word which provide the moral life with its unity. The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest. (MacIntyre 1981: 219)

MacIntyre defines *narrative quest* as a circular teleology. Life is lived with a goal, but the most important aspect of life is the formulation and re-formulation of that goal, which is a life-long process: "We have then arrived at a provisional conclusion about the good life for man: the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is" (MacIntyre 1981: 219). As Rüdiger Bender (1998) notes, the questioning of what is good itself hence turns into a virtue. In searching for a narratable unity, I discover what represents for me the good life. The understanding of what the good life is cannot be captured in static terms: it is a process rather than an outcome. Narrative inquiry thus takes on a value of good itself and functions as a process as well as the goal (Bender 1998).

Such privileging of the process is critical if life story is to retain the quality of quest—the quality that, I would argue, grounds ethical dimension within life story as such and not externally as it is articulated in McAdams's model. McAdams's theory runs into problems by defining virtue through universal statements about human nature (Is the ideal of redemptive universally shared? Does it have to be universally shared?), rather than in terms of questioning of what is good. If, following MacIntyre's proposal, the dimension of quest is incorporated into an analysis of life story as proposed by McAdams, the latter will be able to address a multitude of practices of the good life.

Furthermore, "narratability" allows MacIntyre to ground ethics in singularity without declaring one way of life to be better than others. A story can only be rendered through references to concrete experiences, special circumstances, purposes, aims and emotions as well as the historical conditions of those involved. The narrating self does not refer to an abstract identity but to its

individual life story developed in concrete social and historical circumstances (Bender 1998). These considerations can be also incorporated into the model of identity as a life story.

While MacIntyre's approach to ethics can address some deficiencies in the ethics implied by narrative psychology, Paul Patton (1986) suggests that MacIntyre's system has its own serious limitations in addressing contemporary ethical challenges. Patton argues that MacIntyre's account of narrative is rooted in modern assumptions and as such does not address the postmodern condition of subjects that are "fragmented and dispersed across the range of social categories and institutional sites; male, female; sick, healthy; school, workplace, and so on" (Patton 1986: 139). According to Patton, MacIntyre's "undifferentiated and global notion of the modern self" prevents him from engaging with specific challenges of postmodern ethics. By contrast, as Zygmunt Bauman maintains, these challenges are most adequately met by the ethical systems that are grounded in the encounter with the Other, and in which, as in Levinas's theorizing, ethics precedes ontology. In some fundamental ways, however, such a position was anticipated by Bakhtin's engagement with ethics earlier in the twentieth century.

As Terry Eagleton comments regarding Bakhtin's unique perspective on language, "If communication is what makes us human, linguistics can never be entirely distinguished from ethics" (Eagleton 2007: 13). Indeed, at the core of Bakhtin's understanding of discourse is a conviction that "verbal expression is never just a reflection of something existent beyond it that is given and "finished off". It always creates something absolutely new and unique, something that is always related to life values such as truth, goodness and beauty" (Bakhtin 1979: 299). Bakhtin further introduces the notion of "my non-alibi in being" to reinforce his emphasis on personal responsibility for ethical actions, which cannot be regulated by already predetermined rules or norms: "I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being that is unique and never repeatable, a place that cannot be taken by anyone else and is impenetrable for anyone else. In the given once-occurrent point where I am now located, no one else has ever been located in the once-occurrent Being" (Bakhtin 1993: 40). From here Bakhtin goes on to define an *answerable* deed as one grounded in this unique position: "An answerable act or deed is precisely that act which is performed on the basis of an acknowledgement of my obligative uniqueness [...] this affirmation of my non-alibi in being [...] to be in life, to be *actually*, is to *act*" (Bakhtin 1993: 42).

The logic linking act, uniqueness and non-alibi in being that defines Bakhtin's ethics can provide an invaluable insight for psychology. Bakhtin develops this perspective specifically as an alternative to *theoretism*, which implies reliance on prescriptive substantive ethics, and *empathy*, which implies reliance on emotional regulation as a basis of ethical behaviour. Despite Hermans's declared attempt to use Bakhtin's theorizing as an inspiration for his own work, precisely these two approaches are uncritically utilized by Hermans in addressing ethics. According to Bakhtin, theoretism is fraught with problems in approaching human acts as it fails to recognize the value of the singular individual agent. But reliance on empathy that tries to understand an act from inside is equally insufficient as a basis for ethical behaviour. The danger here is that empathy requires total identification with the Other and the abandonment by the self of its unique position in life. According to Bakhtin, this collapse of two distinct subjective positions does not expand, but rather delimits, the understanding of one human being by another: "If I actually lost myself in the other, instead of two participants there would be one — an impoverishment of Being" (Bakhtin 1993: 16). Morson and Emerson (1989: 11) poignantly summarize these Bakhtinian considerations: "Systematic ethics respects no person, empathy one person". Both empathy and theoretical abstraction represent reductionist, and as such, "unethical" positions for Bakhtin.

Bakhtin's concern with ethics and its grounding in otherness (and later dialogue) are congruent with the emphasis on the primacy of the Other as a basis of an ethical system that underpins the work of Emmanuel Levinas. As Nealon (1997: 133) notes, "It is Bakhtin's and Levinas's mutual insistence on the subject's irreducible engagement with otherness that has brought them so centrally into the contemporary dialogue concerning ethical subjectivity". The encounter with the Other becomes foundational for the theorizing of ethics for both thinkers encompassing Bakhtin's "answerability" and Levinas's "responsibility". More specifically, both thinkers ground ethics in otherness not only by virtue of the latter being distinct from the self but, more importantly, as

something that *cannot be assimilated* by the self in principle. As Augusto Ponzio (1987: 6) elaborates and expands, “What unites especially Bakhtin and Levinas is their both having identified otherness within the sphere of the self, which does not lead to its assimilation, but quite on the contrary, gives rise to a constitutive impediment to the integrity and closure of self”.

According to Bauman (1993), Levinas’s ethics responds to the unique challenges of postmodernism, informed by the decentralization of the subject and insistence on moral agency. Bauman proclaims (1993: 84) that “Levinas’s is the postmodern ethics” *par excellence* because “[a] postmodern ethics would be one that readmits the Other as the neighbour, [...] an ethics that recasts the Other as the crucial character in the process through which the moral self comes into its own”. But while Levinas urges us most radically to look outside the self for the conditions of agency, responsibility and ethical subjectivity, narrative and dialogue can provide useful mid-level concepts that align subject and ethics within a single philosophical system allowing us not only to posit but also to address human being in a variety of practices in a way that is internally ethically informed.

Such a view finds further support in constructivist quarters. Most passionately it has been advocated by Kenneth Gergen. Pointing to the phenomenon described as “the death of self by technology”, Gergen argues that as a result of the ever-increasing insinuations of the technologies of socialization, encompassing the polyvocality, plasticity, repetition and transience of the self, the intelligibility of the individual self as an originary source of moral action has been dramatically undermined. In a similar way, postmodern changes undermine the viability of community as a moral touchstone. Given the fact that social organization cannot be separated from the technological context that has been erasing old forms of face-to-face community organization, substituting them with various forms of virtual association, communalism in a traditional sense can no longer sustain ethics. For Gergen, theorizing the moral project in the twenty-first century involves an attempt to subsume both self and community within a broader reality of relatedness, and this offers a meaningful alternative to individualism and communalism. Refuting the potential accusation of “moral relativism” Gergen defends a relational account born of a constructionist sensibility, as moral resources for the future, in the following way:

Yet, it is precisely within its groundlessness that we locate the moral potential of constructionism for the postmodern world. There is no attempt within constructionism to ground its suppositions in a foundation or first philosophy, nor simultaneously to suppress any ethic or ideology. Rather, from the constructionist perspective, all moral discourses are resources for creating meaning making — which is to say, resources essential for creating any sense of the good (worth, value, ideals). (Gergen 2001: 195)

Gergen further argues that the moral project requires no foundational rationality, but rather “is always already in motion” as “normal human interchange will yield up standards of the good”. The realization of such an inductive and contingent approach to ethics is found in White and Epston’s narrative practice. Unlike McAdams and Hermans, White and Epston do not seek “moral refuge in a rational set of universal [ethical] principles” (Parker 1990: 32), but rather mobilize the intrinsic potential for “doing ethics” inherent in narrative itself.

To summarize: the understanding of ethics within a broad narrative and dialogical framework allows us to address not only modern but also postmodern conditions, and its implications for conceptualization of the subject. The unique features of a narrative and dialogical understanding of ethics are encapsulated in two principles: the primacy of the particular over the general, and a systematic examination of the notion of the good. Narrative understanding of ethics is non-ontological and is not grounded in substantive conceptions of the good life. Rather, it assumes, as Colebrook highlights in a passage cited earlier, that “there ought to be no *techne* that is disengaged from life, and life’s proper *techne* — the art of life — is nothing other than making meaning of, or narrating of, one’s life” (Colebrook 2006). Virtue therefore turns from a principle into a quest, a quest urging us to examine and re-examine the ongoing unfolding of life vis-à-vis a re-examination of the notion of good. This questioning can only become fully meaningful in the field of tension created by the presence of the human Other—and is thus always already dialogical

by its very nature. In this way, as has been suggested by Stewart-Sicking (2008), the narrative understanding of ethics can allow psychology to move beyond merely providing rules for ethical practice to consider the practice of psychology itself as an exercise in virtue ethics.

If the appropriation of the notion of narrative proves to be constructive with regards to such crucial issues for psychology as the conceptualization of the subject, the subject's transformation and methodology, its greatest promise lies, no doubt, in foregrounding the ethical dimension in all of the above-mentioned areas. Understood as open, contingent, embodied and addressed to the dialogical partner, narrative in itself provides a new paradigm in ethics, making possible a departure from prescriptive normative ethics brought from without, and instead articulating the ethics from within. In this, narrative perspective has a unique potential that makes possible the integration of an ethical dimension as a fundamental axis of theory, methodology and practice.

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